University of Alberta

Understanding School Writing: Exploring the perspectives of teachers, students, and parents in a grade six context

by

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Abstract

There is a growing body of research on effective writing pedagogy; however, little research has been done on the perceptions of parents, teachers, and students in a shared context. This study explored parent, teacher, and student understandings of writing instruction in an elementary school. A two-phase methodology included a survey administered to twenty-five participants and follow-up interviews with nine participants (three from each participant group). The researcher used grounded theory to uncover themes of similarity and variance regarding the participants' understanding of writing instruction in this school. Implications include the need for educators to consider diverse perspectives when implementing writing strategies and programs and to develop methods of two-way communication that will assist in building shared understandings and joint intentions toward improved student achievement in writing.

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The One who created me, for this passion to learn and the desire to ever look for new mountains to climb.

Dedication

To the teachers, students and parents
at Camden School
for so freely sharing their time
and insights into the world of school writing,

and to Grace.

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Chapter One: The Genesis of a Question

In writing this introduction, I have set out to explain my journey into graduate study research and the events that propelled me toward my current study. It begins in my own classroom and tracks through issues of policy, pedagogy and research, finally arriving at a problem to be explored and a question to be asked.

Humbled Beginnings

It was an ordinary day in early spring. The grade one students dispersed to their assigned literacy workstations. I sat down with the guided reading group I had called for that session. As we moved through the stages of our reading lesson together, I assumed my usual subconscious surveillance on the pulse of activity around me. Half-way through the station time, I picked up on a 'disturbance' at the writing centre. Looking up, it was obvious that the ratio of bodies to table space exceeded the assigned four around the little green writing table. Something stopped me from immediately intervening. Instead, for a moment, I watched and listened. Somehow, a spontaneous writing circle had formed. Each of those little heads was bent over paper with pencils working away, asking each other how to spell different words and reading their compositions out loud. I was thrilled and felt proud of them. I was also humbled. This was the most exciting literacy event I had witnessed in my six years as a grade one teacher. Yet, as I reflected on that moment, I could not fully explain it. Then the questions began to form. What had I done differently with this group of students at this particular stage in their writing development in this classroom atmosphere to provide a catalyst for this unprompted collaborative writing action? Was it due to changes in pedagogy? Was it a change of attitude about writing on my part? What were the students thinking and feeling about writing in that moment? Was this group just somehow more ready for writing than other groups in previous years? Could I replicate this climate of writing again?

For the rest of the year, there was such a strong undercurrent of desire for and enjoyment in writing that I changed the rules for workstations. I allowed the students to opt out of their other stations in order to write, as I had previously allowed for independent reading. I ended up having to add another table to the writing centre. And, for the rest of that year, I mulled over my questions. That summer, in my first graduate course, I was captivated to find the echoes of my questions in the worlds of Vygotsky, Rosenblatt, Bhaktin and Britton. Their ideas of the social, transactional, carnivalesque and formative functions of writing provided new lenses for examining school writing as I knew it. As my own theory of language and literacy continued to develop through the following two years of graduate studies and continued teaching, my desire to understand the processes of teaching writing and learning to write continued to grow. During my second year of studies, the intersections of my experiences, my school context and exposure to others' research led me to the decision to transfer to a thesis-based degree in order put form to my questions with a purpose to act on them. When it came time to choose a topic for my thesis research, these forces converged, leading me to the need to explore what it means to understand the teaching and learning of writing and what that process entails.

The Impetus of Context

My need to explore issues of understanding of school writing was rooted strongly in the context of the school, district and province in which I have taught. When I began my research journey, I was in my eighth year of teaching in the early elementary program at Camden School[1]. The history of my teaching career juxtaposes with significant events in policy and pedagogical changes in the district and province. Two years before I began teaching, the urban, Western Canadian school district to which Camden School belongs, recognized the need to address low student achievement levels in reading and writing. Literacy consultants in the district developed and copyrighted a literacy program that included intensive teacher training aimed at improving teaching practice and developing effective resources for improving student achievement in reading and writing, a program in which I was trained early in my career. Around the same time, the provincial government also set in motion a plan to improve student achievement through developing stronger pedagogical practices. For the past seven years, with funding provided by the government, the school district developed a range of professional literacy development programs. Each school within the district has been required to identify and focus staff professional development on one of the district's three-year instructional focus plans based on the government funded initiatives. Camden School's first two instructional focus cycles targeted improving reading comprehension. At the time I began my research on writing, my school was completing its first year of a new instructional focus plan aimed at improving student achievement in writing. Staff professional development sessions throughout the year were based on the implementation of writing strategies taken from Spandel (2004, 2005) and Culham's (2003, 2005) Writing Traits programs, often referred to colloquially as "6+1" or "the Traits." and hereafter identified as such in this document.

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[1] Pseudonym

For the most part, these concentrated efforts on all levels of the public education structure appear to be having a positive impact. Over the last five years, there has been a general trend toward improvement in reading and writing achievement at the grade one level within the school district (Report on Edmonton's Children and Youth, 2006). The number of grade three and grade six students meeting or exceeding the acceptable standard in reading and writing on 2006 Provincial Achievement Exam results is approximately 80% (EPS Education Results Report, 2006). However, beyond these statistics provided for public consumption, there is very little research on the actual implementation and implications of these shifts in policy on the practices of teachers and the experiences of students and parents in the system. Some of the research that has come to light raises questions about the real-world impact of these efforts in pedagogy.

A Catalyst in Another's Research

My experiences, studies and the intense climate toward pedagogical improvement in literacy in which I taught had brought me to the place of needing to better understand writing in this context for myself. The shape of my research question and mode of my study was influenced significantly by questions raised by another researcher. Her work proved to be a catalyst in the transformation of my research topic into a research question. I had the honor of being a guest at the table with Dr. Linda Phillips at the January, 2007, meeting of the Northern Alberta Reading Specialists' Council. As part of a panel discussion representing a researcher's perspective on factors for promoting life-long reading, Dr. Phillips shared results of a recent survey of adults in the province that indicated the vast majority had little understanding of how reading was taught in school. In addition, the majority of those adults who were parents with children in school wondered how well teachers understood the reading program they were implementing since most were unable to offer explicit advice on the ways parents could help their children with reading at home. I was struck with the realization that these results were obtained within the context of nearly a decade of government and district emphasis on improvement in literacy, particularly in the instruction of reading. I was unsettled by this disconnect of understandings about reading instruction between school and adults in the public, many of whom would presumably be parents of school aged children.

A Question Arises

As I considered the implications of Dr. Phillip's data, the seeming incongruity between what I as a teacher perceived as a saturation of explicitness in the pedagogy of reading instruction and a public lack of knowledge of the same raised a parallel concern. If there was a possibility that a large portion of parents in the province were not sharing in the understandings of instructional methods and practices in reading at school after such intensive efforts by the public education sector to focus on improving these methods, then what degree of shared understanding would be present in the area of writing instruction, a relatively smaller piece of the intensive improvement picture?

Thus, the research question for my study took form: How do teachers, students and their parents understand school writing in one shared elementary school context?

Significance

A number of factors point to the importance of exploring this issue of understandings of writing from different perspectives. Writing is both a keystone of the language arts curriculum as well as the functioning of school curriculum as a whole. The experiences of students with writing instruction in school impacts their levels of achievement. Another factor in student achievement is the involvement or support of education on the part of parents. The connectedness of these factors in the acquisition of language arts skills is echoed in the introduction of the Common Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts: "Responsibility for language learning is shared by students, parents, teachers, and the community" (1998, p. 1).

The importance of writing in the curriculum. The current provincial language arts curriculum is based on the Western and Norhern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education (1998), commonly referred to as WNCP, that was created through the cooperation of the ministries of Education of the four western provinces and the two existing territories at that time. Student learning outcomes are presented as "interrelated and interdependent" (p. 4), to be implemented through six language arts described as listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing and representing. On writing in particular, the WNCP states:

> Reading and writing are powerful means of communicating and learning. They enable students to extend their knowledge and use of language, increase their understanding of themselves and others, and experience enjoyment and personal satisfaction....Writing enables students to explore, shape, and clarify their thoughts, and to communicate them to others. By using effective writing strategies, they discover and refine ideas and compose and revise with increasing confidence and skill. (p. 3).

This importance of writing has been enacted through the recent moves in our district to improve writing pedagogy and the need to examine its status in the current educational situation is becoming evident. Our own context is reflected in the field of education at large. Writing continues to be listed as a topic that is 'not hot' but 'should be hot' in the annual survey of leaders in the literacy field conducted by the International Reading Association (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2008). As contributors to a recent anthology of best practices in writing instruction, Pressley, Mohan, Fingeret, Reffitt and Raphael-Bogaert (2007) describe a rising disparity in the United States between the improved reading scores and an apparently wide-spread understanding of effective reading pedagogy and the lower scores and greater discontinuity in the implementation of effective writing pedagogy. This disparity has resulted in increased impetus for taking an intense look at the state of writing instruction in the United States (Moats, Foorman & Taylor, 2006). While this disparity is not yet as salient in the Canadian context, it suggests an issue that warrants close consideration and mindfulness of the possibility that we follow the trends of our neighbors to the south.

The impact of student experiences with writing pedagogy. There is a growing body of research literature on the experiences of students with writing instruction from early years through to graduate studies. A number of studies will be examined in a review of the literature that formed my research question, however, one study in particular exemplifies the impact of students' perceptions of writing pedagogy on their achievement. An article describing Casey and Hemenway's (2001) longitudinal study of the attitudes and experiences with writing instruction of students from their third grade to graduation was another catalyst in the formation of my research question. These researchers studied student experiences with classroom practices that motivated them to write, and to write well, and those that did not. As they followed Paige* from grade three through grade twelve, they saw a gradual wane in her desire to put effort into writing at school. Their conclusion was that students need to perceive their efforts in writing to be worthwhile. For example, when Paige felt that her teacher's responses to her writing were legitimate, valid, and aimed at prompting her to improve her work, both her effort and related skill growth increased. In years where she perceived a lack of correlation between her effort and teacher investment, her writing performance decreased. This study reflected elements of my own search to understand some of the mysteries that surrounded conducive writing instruction and raised a further concern over what happens when school understandings of writing may not connect with student conceptions of writing that matters to them. It also caused me to consider where I would situate my own students' impromptu writing circle moment within her story, and how a better understanding of student experiences and understandings of how writing is taught could relate to better achievement.

Murphy (2000) states that "knowledge about writing…is not a given distributed by the teacher, or exclusively a product of the individual, but something that is socially constructed by members of a class or between a teacher and a student over time" (p. 81). As I considered both the importance of strong writing instruction and the impact of student experiences with that instruction on their own levels of performance in writing, I was drawn back to Dr. Phillip's research and began to wonder how this dyad of student and teacher in relation to the writing curriculum fit into the larger social context that included parents, and where the problem of lack of parent understanding of school practice intersected with the teacher and student relationship with the curriculum.

The interaction of parents and school literacy practices. Researchers in the area of parent involvement in education, including Duke and Purcell-Gates (2003), Hoover-

Dempsey, Epstein and others (Ditrano & Silverstein, 2006; Epstein, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Ferrara & Ferrara 2005; Hoover Dempsey et al, 2005; Reed, Jones, Walker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2000), have examined the ways that schools and parents recognize, understand and utilize the interconnected influence of home, school and community to have a positive impact on student learning. In general, their conclusions, and those of most current research in the field, are that parent involvement seems to have a positive impact on student achievement, but they emphasize the need for continued research and improvement in this area. As the variations in access to and types of interaction that parents have with school, and their subsequent effects, are the topics of ongoing research described in more detail in the following literature review, one facet of the dynamic of parent understanding of writing in school stands out. That is, the impact of parent experiences with, and understandings of, school literacy on their children's ability to succeed at academic literacy practices.

As Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, and Degener (2004) point out, a well-documented association exists between socio-economic status, which includes issues of both income and social class, and academic achievement. However, they go on to dispel the notion that money, or lack there-of, is the primary causal factor for success in academics. Instead, they point out that although "all children of parents who read and write will experience the written genre practices of their parents and communities, children of highly educated parents will also experience written genre practices that reflect those academic practices valued in school," thus increasing their likelihood of achieving success in academic literacy practices (Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, 2004, p.

136f). In essence, parents who understand and value school versions of reading and writing are more likely to have children who succeed in the school context in these areas.

Proposal

It is clear that learning to write well is important, therefore the teaching of writing is important. We know that students who are engaged during writing instruction are more willing, and often more able, to respond to instruction in writing. Parent ability to support student learning is another piece of the student achievement jigsaw. These three premises of effective learning related to writing support each other and, in their very juxtaposition, also reveal the need for an exploration of how these important aspects of student learning impact and interact with each other. They reveal a need to form an integrated picture of the understandings that parents, teachers and students hold about the implementation of the writing curriculum in the classroom and what possible impact the similarities and differences in these understandings might have on student achievement.

In preparation for the construction of a study that would allow me to begin an exploration of teacher, student and parent understandings of writing in the school context, the problem of intersubjectivity in the teaching and learning of writing must find its place within the landscape of current educational theory, research and practice. In the following chapter, a review of the literature pertinent to the topic in these areas will be presented, building the case for examination of this issue and the format for my study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review of Understandings of School Writing

In preparation for designing a study that would explore the processes of understanding school writing from diverse vantage points, it was important to situate my emerging research question within the bodies of literature that contribute to our current understandings of school writing, and the roles that individuals' perspectives play in constructing those understandings. The research base on writing and writing instruction in the last ten years has been limited in some areas, particularly with regard to teacher, student and parent perceptions of writing and how writing is taught.

This literature review will establish a context of research and theory that elucidates three key issues. First, writing pedagogy has both changed and stayed the same over the last three decades with implementation variations and diverse understandings of current practice. Second, teacher and student perceptions shape the nature of their interactions within school writing pedagogy. Third, the social context of school writing, including parent interaction, has promise of impact on student achievement but is not yet well understood. By examining the literature that constitutes our current knowledge related to each of these issues, I will provide the framework from which this study has been developed.

Writing Pedagogy

Recent research from the United States points to a growing disparity between higher achievement results in reading and lower results in writing (Pressley, Mohan, Fingeret, Reffitt and Raphael-Bogaert, 2007). While the Canadian provincial achievement results mentioned in the introductory chapter do not yet herald the same issue in Canada, this report should encourage us to consider the issue of strengthening understandings of school writing pedagogy. In order to address the question of "what" individuals understand about writing in schools, it is necessary to build a comparable picture of "what" the current understandings of writing are from a theoretical and pedagogical perspective.

Process Approaches

Process approaches are perhaps the most widely recognized development in writing pedagogy over the last three decades. The research and seminal works of Murray (1968), Graves (1983), and Calkins (1986) introduced process approach theories through a writing workshop structure, and writing workshops continued to be refined by these researchers and others, such as Atwell (1987, 1998), who emphasizes the usefulness of this approach with middle-school age children. Two decades ago, Hairston (1982) described an impending paradigm shift in writing pedagogy away from traditional models that are "prescriptive and product-centred" (p.80) toward a discovery-oriented process approach. While she cited the possibility that the paradigm shift began as early as the 1950's, Hairston stated that process-oriented paradigms were far from being "conventional wisdom" in the 1980's.

The influence of these early theories and theorists of process approach in writing pedagogy is ongoing. In her review of writing research from the mid-seventies to the early nineties, Sulzby (1992) traces the growth in understanding, acceptance and support of the emergent writing process as a legitimate and necessary step in children's writing development. The early work of Lucy McCormick Calkins (1986), who continues to publish teacher resources on writing workshop in early elementary years (Calkins et al, 2003), has been particularly influential. Even as process approaches and writing workshops continue to be supported and promoted, ideas of workshop and process continue to evolve. Lensmire (2000) cites emerging tensions between the types of student voice envisioned in positivistic notions of workshop and the more contentious notions of critical pedagogy; he encourages a reconciliation that views process writing workshops as a means of developing students' voices as an ongoing project.

Several kinds of process approach also appear in other aspects of writing pedagogy. The effective implementation of "writing to learn" strategies, reminiscent of Britton's "shaping at the point of utterance," (1982), in language arts and in other subject areas also began with the work of Murray (1968), and such strategies are viewed as important pedagogical aspects in recent research (Hansen, 2005).

The current popularity of pedagogical approaches focused on traits of writing (Culham, 2003; Culham, 2005; Spandel, 2004; Spandel, 2005) is also an off-shoot of process-oriented philosophies of writing instruction. The 6+1 Writing Traits program attempts to facilitate processes of creativity, feedback and recursive revision through its use of mini-lessons, ties to literature and collaborative assessment in the six areas identified as traits: ideas, word choice, organization, voice, sentence fluency, conventions and, as the plus one, presentation. In teacher resource texts and kits, lessons are laid out in units based on each trait. Teachers may teach directly from these resources in the order the texts are laid out. Other teachers may approach the use of 6+1 Writing Traits more as assessment guides or supplemental tools, integrating them into other language arts programs. Individual teacher application of the program varies and may not always reflect the initial intentions of Culham and Spandel.

A possible discordance between research on effective writing pedagogy and the ways that writing is practically understood may still exist. While the concepts of writing process and writing workshop continue to influence current Canadian provincial curricula and are familiar to most writing teachers today, these concepts are not necessarily used by all teachers. As well, public understanding of writing is often focused on the easily measurable and observable elements of written products, such as spelling, punctuation and grammar. Parent understandings of, and beliefs about, pedagogical particulars can often be complex and difficult to ascertain from surface responses of acquiescence or conflict (Dodd, 1998).

Pedagogical Trouble-Spots

These shifts in writing pedagogy in recent decades and the transition time apparent in their actual implementations in the classroom lead to occasional conflicts between the expectations of teachers, and between teachers and parents, regarding good writing pedagogy. Three areas of possible conflict include the teaching of conventions in grammar and spelling, newer conceptions of literacy, and assessment.

Teaching grammar and spelling. Schuster (2004), as member of an advisory committee for one state's writing assessment test, editorializes on the constraints faced by educational administrations in attempting to bridge state-imposed assessment criteria with what is recognized as effective teaching practice. His concerns are reflected from a teacher's perspective by Gold's (2006) narrative on challenging old understandings of pedagogy. In attempting to introduce a student-centred, process-oriented, workshop approach in the language arts program of a new private high school, Gold and his colleagues faced strong resistance and concern from parents and administration, particularly in terms of the mode of grammar instruction. Although their approach proved successful as demonstrated in student performance by the end of the year, it was initially questioned and resisted because it did not take on a recognizable form to parents and administration.

In a review of a century of research on grammar instruction, Andrews et al (2006) state that there has been "no clear evidence" that formal teaching of grammar is helpful (p.52). At the same time, they recognize that many educators still support traditional models of grammar instruction. While they encourage more research into models of practical grammar work that do prove successful, they explain, in part, the continuance of divergent views among educators, researchers and the public on best practices in grammar pedagogy.

Another area with a propensity for bewilderment is spelling pedagogy. The approaches teachers take in the instruction and assessment of spelling vary, even within schools. In one example, a teacher research group, together with a university researcher, observed that their students were negatively impacted by their pedagogical inconsistencies and found that a majority of parents held views of spelling that were in contrast to teachers' views. They aptly describe the challenge of crossed paths in methodological understanding:

> Conventional wisdom surrounding spelling is strong, and much of the research on children's development that discounts those assumptions is relatively recent…[S]ince these findings had not widely influenced classroom practice by the time our students' parents were learning to read and write, it is not surprising that many of them might be threatened or troubled by practices in teaching

> spelling that are so different from what they experienced. (Chandler et al, 2000, p. 229)

The transformations of methods in spelling and grammar are salient examples of the ways in which a generational gap reveals itself between the ways that many teachers and parents learned to write and the ways in which pedagogical practices have shifted in many, but not all, of their children's classrooms.

Newer literacies. To add to a puzzle of perception already present in the landscape of school instruction in writing, the increasing need to recognize, define, evaluate and incorporate shifting representations of writing in current practice outside of school with pedagogies of writing implemented in school is an ongoing challenge. Although the introduction of new technologies has always met with some resistance in writing pedagogy (Baron, 1999), current exponential growth in new media has resulted in a need for researchers and educators to establish new definitions and effective fusions between new modes of literacy and current understandings of effective writing pedagogy (Bearne, 2004; Dyson, 1997; Dyson, 2000; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; McClay, 2002; Millard, 2003).

While research on home literacy practices, typically involving new media forms and technologies and their applications in multi-model texts is a growing field, research on the effective methods of incorporating popular writing practices into school contexts is relatively new and calls for further study (Connolly, Jones & Jones, 2007; Ellison & Wu, 2008; McClay, 2006). If the diversity in teacher beliefs and pedagogical applications in traditional areas of spelling and grammar leads to misunderstandings, the process of defining and incorporating emerging real-world literacy trends into classroom practice is an even greater unknown. Insightful research on new forms of literacy and applications of literate acts in technological forms is being done, but not yet at a volume to create a cohesive picture of effective practices particularly in forms such as instant messaging, texting, blogging and social networking media such as Facebook (Hsu, 2007; Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2007).

Assessment of writing. Another key area of research in the teaching and learning of writing that is significantly impacted by the understandings of teachers, students and parents is the assessment of writing. Just as understandings of the teaching of grammar and spelling and conceptions of new literacies differ among teachers and between teachers and parents, so too do understandings of assessment of writing include a wide scope of interpretations and change over time.

In her review of current research on a lack of intersubjectivity in the understandings of teachers and students related to writing assessment, Murphy (2000) asserts the importance of considering what students say about their learning and the interactions between students and teachers related to the assessment of writing. Bardine, Bardine and Deegan (2000), in their study of teacher responses to writing, describe the dangers of assumed intersubjectivity with regard to student interpretation of teacher feedback. They emphasize the need for teachers to deliberately build shared understanding with their students on the meaning and purpose of their feedback in order to effect change in student writing. In her study of an adolescent writer's mixing of genres in his fantasy narrative, McClay (2002) raises the questions of whether or not teachers have the knowledge to assess new genres of student writing in ways that recognize student use of hybrid genres as valid, and whether or not teachers are permitted the freedom to do so in light of curricular and standardized assessment expectations.

One area of concern is that teachers' intentions in pedagogy can be distorted by the pressure of preparing students for high stakes testing (Skwarchuk, 2004). Elbow (2000) illustrates the fact that there are both negative and positive applications of high-stakes assessment in writing with implications for effecting change in student writing. Though, fortunately, the statistics on low writing achievement reported by Pressley, Mohan, Fingeret, Reffitt and Raphael-Bogaert (2007) do not reflect impending trends for Western Canada, they do provide an illustration of the possible difficulties of teaching and assessing writing within a context of high-stakes literacy assessment. Currently, in Alberta, standardized assessments created by the provincial government are administered in grades three, six, nine and twelve. Though scores on these exams are not directly related to education funding for schools, as is the case for many school systems in the United States, they do exert pressure on schools, and particularly on the teachers in provincial assessment grade levels, to ensure high levels of student performance on those assessments. In a year-long study of one class in a low-achieving school, Beck (2006) found that the teacher narrowed his pedagogical choices in an attempt to reinforce attributes of writing valued on standardized tests, despite his own beliefs about not teaching to the test. He concluded his study with the caution that teachers must "examine their own and their students' subjective understanding of expectations for writing tasks as a first step towards improving the intersubjective understanding that is the basis for effectively communicating these expectations" (p.455).

The recent history of pedagogical change, ongoing areas of possible contention, research into emerging literacy fields and the complexities of assessing writing in this environment all point to the need, now more than ever, to conduct research that looks specifically at the understanding that parents, students, and teachers hold about school writing.

Perceptions of Writing Instruction

While research has provided us with a growing knowledge of effective strategies for teaching writing and other facets of literacy, there is a subjectivity to understandings of literacy and literacy learning that can be overlooked. Within the context of school writing instruction, subjective understandings are revealed both in what we do not yet know about factors that influence learning to write and the requisite understandings of school writing that educators may assume of others.

Subsequent to a three-year study that followed groups of first graders in their writing development, Coker (2006) found that several factors—student background, literacy skill, first-grade teacher and classroom environment—were possible predictors of student writing development. However, he concluded that it was the interaction of these, and other factors not measured, that were most responsible for writing development and makes the assertion that, "[f]urther research is necessary to explore the precise nature of the relationships among the multiple influences of writing development" (Coker, 2006, p. 485).

Concerns over inaccurate assumptions also come into play in terms of what teachers assume about parent knowledge of learning to write. While parents may feel somewhat comfortable supporting their children's development in reading, the support of their children's writing growth can be less clear-cut. In an overview of research on parent understandings of writing instruction in New Zealand, whose education system mirrors much of our literacy pedagogy in Canada, Hartley (2000) cautions educators against relying on previous assumptions of parent knowledge about writing development. She charges educators with the difficult task of taking into account parents' and communities' diverse perspectives and beliefs about writing instruction and working to honor these within the framework of research-based best practices. The immense challenge of acknowledging one's own subjectivity as a teacher (Medina, 2003) and attempting to ascertain the subjective understandings of others in relation to the teaching of writing in school (Beck, 2006; Hartley, 2000; Ravet, 2007) provides a key impetus for this research.

Teacher Perspective

Being a reflective practitioner is considered a hallmark of professional growth as a teacher and pedagogical specialist in literacy (Bintz & Dillard, 2004; Cadiero-Kaplan, 2002; Fullan, Bertani & Quinn, 2004; Lambert, 2003; McAndrew, 2005; Schön, 1987; Sergiovanni, 2004; Wiggins & McTighe, 2006). This literature supports the need for teachers to actively seek awareness of their own beliefs on content and pedagogy in order to evaluate their effectiveness and possible requirements for change.

Research related to both classroom management and instruction demonstrates that teachers may perceive actions and activities in the classroom differently from students and parents. To explore the triangulation of teacher, student and parent understandings of the classroom context, Ravet (2007) studied individuals' understandings of disruptive or disengaged student behavior. She explained the perception gaps, or lack of intersubjectivity, between teachers and students, and their parents in turn, in their beliefs about what constituted disengagement in the classroom and what logical responses to these instances should be. This lack of intersubjectivity in the perceptions of teachers, students and their parents is also described in the research particular to writing and the instruction of writing.

Much of the research on teacher involvement in writing instruction includes consideration of the correlations between teacher practice and attitudes with student achievement. As mentioned in the review of writing assessment literature, teacher perceptions of student ability through assessment is an important issue, especially with increasing pressure to improve standards on district-wide and provincial high-stakes assessments (Skwarchuk, 2004). Beck (2006) explains the tension between teacher's individual beliefs about the best approaches in writing instruction and the responsibility they bear "for preparing students to meet standards that constitute the official, institutional version of mastery in that subject" (p. 421). As Schuster (2004) points out, there can be a significant distance between teachers' individual beliefs about good writing and good writing instruction and the institutionalized assessments of good writing, as per provincial tests, for example. While many teachers seek to reconcile the theoretical with the measurable through assignments and assessments that engage students in authentic writing activities, student perceptions of the nature of assessments does not always follow teacher perceptions (Gulikers, Bastiaens & Kirschner, 2008).

In North America, the majority of teachers are middle-income Caucasian females (Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2007; US Department of Education, 2007). Even before teachers step into classrooms, their pre-conceptions about literacy pedagogy influence them. In a revealing study of undergraduates in a teacher education program, Yadav and Koehler (2007) found that the beliefs that pre-service teachers hold influence their perceptions and interpretations of literacy instruction. In response to similar video segments of writing instruction, students with different epistemological beliefs about how reading and writing are learned perceived very different messages about how writing was being taught. In their study of literacy education in vocational schools, Miller and Satchwell (2006) discuss the dangers of the Pygmalion effect: teachers often approach students at the vocational level with a deficit model of student literacy, emphasizing basic skill practice to the detriment of building on the possible rich literacy practices and interests that students engage in outside school. The concern about teacher beliefs as self-fulfilling prophecies for students is also raised in research on students with special needs and students from diverse backgrounds (McCarthey & Garcia, 2005; Meltzer, Katzir, Miller, Reddy & Roditi, 2004). The impact of teacher experiences and beliefs on the acting out of pedagogy, as in the teaching of writing, and the subsequent concern that students will not perceive the aims of instruction in the way intended are further motivations for this research (Bardine, Bardine, & Deegan, 2000; Beck, 2006; Murphy, 2000).

Student Perspective

Student understandings of, and attitudes toward, school writing have also been shown to have an impact on writing achievement in school. Duke and Purcell-Gates (2003) explain the importance of the intersection of home and school genres of literacy for helping young children make meaningful connections between literacy acts and their every-day lives. Encouraging student choice and the inclusion of relevance in writing activities requires a means of including and responding to student voice (Albers & Cowan, 2006).

Student preference for, and engagement in, non-school versus school-based writing demonstrates a misfit of definitions of what constitutes real writing and its potential to impact school writing performance. McClay (2005) describes the motivation of avid writers to see significance in their personal writing unconnected to teacher assessment. For many of the young adolescents she studied, the writing that they treasured was completely separate from school writing, and they often experienced a disconnect with their school language arts experiences. The caution that school understandings of writing may not connect with student conceptions of personally relevant writing reveals a need to consider this contrast when examining students' understandings about writing. As illustrated in my introduction, Paige's ability to explain her own understandings of what enabled her to be successful in school writing is evidence that students have the capacity to take ownership of their own writing processes in conducive contexts (Casey & Hemenway, 2001).

In a study of young, fluent writers revision practices, Dix (2006) found that, when given opportunity to express their understandings, students demonstrated meta-cognitive awareness of what they were doing to revise their work and why the revisions they chose were appropriate. Case studies of primary students in Great Britain whose teachers were engaged in an action research project to improve instruction in writing found that students made higher gains in academic achievement as measured by standardized assessments when they were allowed to engage in both independent and shared writing, to choose their writing topics, to receive authentic feedback from teachers and to share their writing with an audience (Graham, 2001).

Students' ownership of their writing is also fostered by instructional settings that recognize and build on student history, cultural background and family literacy experiences (Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003; Dyson, 1997; Dyson, 2000). In her study of an Appalachian student's perceptions of discourse during writing conferences, Powers (2002) describes the negative impact that a lack of teacher understanding of a student's background can have on attempts to build a mutual goal in writing. She cites the case of one boy for whom this disconnect prompted a deliberate disengagement from what he perceived as the school "way of talking" in order to preserve what he valued as his own subjective knowledge of language and writing.

If students perceive a personal connection to the content of an assignment, they are more likely to become engaged and are more likely to experience higher levels of achievement (Bintz & Dillard, 2004; Brookhart & Bronowicz, 2003; Ray, 2004). Motivation is also increased when students perceive a personal benefit to engaging in a literacy practice, whether for peer or teacher approval or response (Casey & Hemenway, 2001; Meltzer, Katzir, Miller, Reddy & Roditi, 2004) or for personal enjoyment (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006; McClay, 2005). This study will attempt to address the need to better understand student motivations and perceptions related to school writing in order to improve opportunities for real engagement.

Parent Perspective

The preceding sections point out the need for further exploration of teachers' and students' subjective and intersubjective interactions with writing pedagogy. These interactions do not occur in a vacuum. While the work inside the institutions of schools, or even within classrooms themselves, may have isolationist aspects, research demonstrates that the influences of family, culture and society permeate every aspect of learning. However, the nature and reciprocity of these interactions is not yet well understood.

Student perception of parent involvement. Edwards and Alldred (2000), in their study of the roles that students take in parent/school interaction, and Forsberg (2007), in his study of parent/student negotiations over homework, bridge the research on student and parent perspectives. Edwards & Alldred (2000) assert that students are typically assigned a role as "inert recipients" of the one-way actions and attitudes of parents and teachers toward them (p. 440). In their study of children's perspectives on parent involvement, they found that children were able to explain themselves as both active and passive participants to parent involvement or non-involvement, and may actively choose to limit their own parent's involvement in order to preserve independence or to prevent judgment. Forsberg (2007) also illustrates this conflict between student and parent perceptions of desirable parental roles of involvement. Both studies raise concerns over the facility with which teachers may judge parents as uninvolved based on their own perceptions of what parent involvement should entail. This concern is an important consideration in light of the research promoting more parental involvement as a means of improving student achievement, leading to questions of what kinds of involvement are most beneficial, and to whom.

Parent interactions with school. Research related to the impact of home and school writing experiences usually highlights the relevance of parent interaction with the process of schooling. Parent involvement generally correlates with student achievement, and that improvement in the frequency and nature of parent involvement will also improve student achievement (Boone, Hartzman & Mero, 2006; Cox, 2005; Epstein, 2005; Hughes & Kwok, 2007). The literature emphasizes the need for, and possibility of, constructive, reciprocal communication between schools and parents in order to promote student achievement (Bridgemohan, van Wyk & van Staden, 2005; Chandler et al, 2000; Cox, 2005; Ditrano & Silverstein, 2006; Epstein, 2005; Halsey, 2005: Nistler & Maiers, 1999; Stockman & Powers, 1996).

There are many schools and teachers that have invited and encouraged beneficial parent involvement; the literature includes efforts that involve a juxtaposition of philosophies of partnership and practical acts (Boone, Hartzman & Mero, 2006; Epstein, 2005; Kirby-Linton, Lyle & White, 1997; Sanders, Epstein, Connors-Tadros, 1999). Epstein and Sander's (2006) work on parental involvement roles and the need for schools to actively invite parent participation is prominent in the literature on parent involvement. Their categorization of six types of parents' involvement with schools lists parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community. Recently, Hoover-Dempsey and her colleagues have focused particularly on some of the specific factors that influence parents' choices to become involved in school, such as the roles they see as available to them and their sense of the effectiveness of their involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005; Reed, Jones, Walker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2000).

Positive parent involvement is especially important and effective in the area of literacy (Clark & Pillion, 2002; Epstein, 2005; Hartley, 2000; Hertz-Lazarowitz &

Horovitz, 2002; Morrow, Kuhn & Schwanenflugel, 2006; Nistler & Maiers, 1999; Reutzel, Fawson & Smith, 2006). A Canadian study of over 450 children, between four and seven years of age, and their parents indicated a correlation between print knowledge and early reading skills, and between parent-reported literacy activities at home and student writing achievement (Levy, Gong, Hessels, Evans & Jared, 2005). The direct efforts of parents, especially mothers, to engage their children in experiences and discussions with print correlated most with children's development of print knowledge and reading skills, much more so than the passive involvement of children being read to by parents. The importance of purposeful parent-to-child engagement with text underlines the need for researchers and teachers to gain an understanding of current parent understandings of their own home literacy involvement in order to support the significant role parents play in the literacy development of their children.

Researchers raise some concerns about the difficulty of measuring the impact of parent involvement. Fan and Chen (2001), in their meta-analysis of studies on parent involvement and students' academic achievement, found that parental expectations for student achievement had the highest correlation with student achievement and that the involvement of parents with school work at home has the weakest relationship. However, they point out inconsistencies in the current body of empirical research on parent involvement, with a key issue being the lack of a consistent operational definition of what parental involvement means.

Most of this current research on parent interaction with school involves parent involvement roles in support of student achievement and school actions to promote more parent involvement. Parents' perceptions of school instruction, and the pedagogy of writing in particular, are less researched. One area that begins to address this need is research conducted on communication between home and school.

Communication with school. In a review of 18 empirical home/school intervention studies, Cox (2005) found that the most effective interventions involved parent and teacher interaction in the form of two-way communication and collaborative action research teams. In addition to improved rigor in the collection and analysis of quantitative data, Cox also recommends further qualitative studies that consider the experiences of parents and teachers involved in home/school interventions. My qualitative exploration of parent understandings of school writing will take issues of experience and communication into consideration.

As two-way communication is emerging as a key factor in effective home/school interaction, it is clear that parents who face barriers to knowledge about, and involvement in, school may face challenges in supporting their children's learning (Cairney, 1999; Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999; Wong & Hughes, 2006). Due to the increasingly multicultural nature of schools in Western Canada, it is important to consider the literature that recognizes the impact of cultural differences, attitudes, experiences and language on the achievement of multicultural students in Western educational systems (Anderson & Gunderson, 1997; Guofang, 2006; McCarthey & Garcia, 2005; Pushor & Murphy, 2004). Joshi, Eberly and Konzal (2005) point out that the problem often involves an "unarticulated clash" between parents and teachers due to a lack of understanding of the subjective goals each holds for the education of children. When these goals arise intrinsically from different cultural backgrounds and values in regard to child-rearing and the roles of parents and schools in educating children, it is that much more important for parents and teachers to develop a shared understanding of each other's perspectives.

Differences in understandings may influence not only student achievement, but also parent ability to gain information about the processes of school. Teachers typically communicate from their known experience and beliefs about education (Yadav & Koehler, 2007). When teacher and parent backgrounds differ, especially in regard to schooling, parents may have difficulty feeling that their experiences and views are relevant (Bridgemohan, van Wyk, & van Staden, 2005; Joshi, Eberly & Konzal, 2005). In their study of relationships between two school districts in England and the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities that the school personnel termed "hard-to-reach", Crozier and Davies (2007) found that the parents' perceptions were more that the schools themselves were "hard-to-reach." They point out, as one example, that for many of the Muslim families, the role of overseeing the educational progress of children belongs to head of the family, the father. As most fathers' work schedules prevented visits to school, these families faced barriers to being seen as visibly involved in their children's education. Communication from school to home was always in English. In addition, the researchers "found no evidence" of efforts by the schools to contact either of the communities to find out "what they needed or might want to support their involvement" (Crozier & Davies, 2007, p.307). The combination of false assumptions about parent involvement and the challenges parents face to access school information limited the development of relationships between parents in theses communities and the schools their children attended.

The result of school attempts to reach out to families, even amongst similar socio-cultural and economic backgrounds, is still often through communication that is one-way (Maclure & Walker, 2000; Marsh, 2003), or not interpreted by parents and teachers in the same way (Halsey, 2005). Hughes and Greenhough (2006) studied four schools' attempts to address parent concerns about a lack of knowledge on how literacy was being taught to their children through the use of videos demonstrating classroom literacy instruction and accompanying booklets suggesting home support strategies. They found, however, that although most parents appreciated the glimpse into the classroom experiences of their children, there was little evidence in parent responses of an awareness of the instructional methods demonstrated in the video or that the video and booklet caused any change in home literacy activities. This lack of intersubjectivity about the experiences and understandings of others in relation to school instruction, despite best intentions to communicate on the part of teachers and school staff, highlights the need for further research into how elements of school instruction are perceived by students and parents who are the typical recipients of school communication.

Issues in parent/teacher interaction. In much of this literature, a call for further work on establishing constructive, cooperative parent-teacher-student partnerships is repeatedly put forward (Epstein, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Purcell-Gates, 1997), often with positive results (Nistler & Maiers, 1999). However, as the studies by Hughes and Greenhaugh (2007) and Marsh (2003) illustrate, positive partnerships may be pursued but may not be realized because of parents' difficulties in overcoming the one-way flow of information and opportunity from school to parent.

As current literature indicates the importance of constructive parent involvement and effective two-way communication, it also reveals challenges that arise in the parent / teacher dynamic. When conflict occurs between parents and teachers or other school staff it is often in response to a perceived alienation of parent perspectives or misapplication of power either from parent to teacher or from teacher to parent (Attanuci, 2004; Lasky, 2000). Ranson, Martin and Vincent (2004) studied ways that parents perceive school responses to their attempts to resolve issues about their children's schooling. They found that parents who shared a similar background to the school received more satisfactory responses to their instigated communications, and that topics related to the welfare of their children produced more acceptable responses than issues parents raised over student behavior and academic progress. Wentzel (1998) found that the social address variables of race, community and the sex of the child have an impact on parent beliefs about intelligence, parenting and expectations for children's achievement. These beliefs, she states, in turn influence parents' goals for their children's educational attainment. Parents' may feel alienated or powerless due to their past experiences with school, either as students themselves or with older children, compounded by barriers of culture or background (Cairney, 1999; Gewirtz, Dickson, Power, Halpin & Whitty, 2005; Klinger, 2000; Lareau &McNamara Horvat, 1999).

At times, conflict arises in direct relation to pedagogy (Dodd, 1998; Gold, 2006). Dodd (1998, 1997) found that parents tended to have a favorable view of teaching practices if they engaged students, addressed specific student needs, had real-world relevance, and/or preserved a tradition. She emphasizes the importance of ensuring that parents have the information they need in relation to their children's experiences in school and calls upon educators to understand parent perspectives in order to resolve conflict.

Direction for Current Study

This review of the professional, theoretical and research literature related to writing and the instruction of writing in school reveals important issues that will be addressed in this study. The complex interaction of beliefs about writing, pedagogical theories of effective writing instruction, perceptions of instructional processes and the involvement of diverse perspectives of teachers, students and parents demonstrates the need for further exploration on understandings of school writing.

Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study will be to examine the ways that elementary school teachers, parents, and students understand writing and the teaching of writing. This research will be designed in order to bring the discussion of understanding and stakeholder partnership in learning and teaching writing in the elementary years to an urban, western Canadian context—a perspective with limited representation in current research so far. As the target audience for this research will consist, primarily, of researchers and educators, the results of this study will be communicated as issues for further research and practical applications to teachers.

From a teacher's perspective, having a better understanding of where my perspectives may differ from those of my students and parents may allow me to better explain what I am doing, and why, during the actual act of teaching writing. Seeing writing instruction through the eyes of my students, such as Paige (citation) and my grade one writing circle, may answer some the of the how and why questions related to their willingness to take risks and to take pleasure in school writing. If teachers and administrators are more cognizant of the processes involved in constructing an understanding of writing, we may discern possible changes in instructional practice to better facilitate shared understandings with parents and students about school writing and instruction methods.

I hope that the results of this research project will be able to provide a first building block toward forming a communication bridge between teachers and parents about pedagogy. The ultimate goal of this research project is that to the extent that it allows for a better understanding of parent, student and teacher perspectives of school writing, it will encourage pedagogical and relational changes that will in turn have positive impacts on student achievement in writing.

Re-iterating the Research Question

The question that prompted this review of literature for the formation of my study was: How do teachers, students and their parents understand school writing in one shared elementary school context?

After considering the current literature on school writing, I will use several supporting questions to assist in this exploration of participants' understandings. These questions include: How do individuals define school writing, and 'good' writing in particular? How have experiences with writing influenced individuals' understandings of school writing? How does the process of understanding school writing intersect or diverge between individuals? With my research question and supporting questions as guide, I will describe the formation of my research design and methodology.

Chapter Three: Method for Exploring Understandings of School Writing

Research Design

The intent of this research project was to build a picture of parents', students' and teachers' understandings of writing and how writing is taught in schools. Open-ended questionnaires incorporating demographic questions, and semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were used to solicit perspectives from individuals in each of these groups within the context of a grade six cohort at Camden School.

Research Site and Subjects

Camden School is an example of what is becoming typical of many schools in this school district in a large and growing Western Canadian city. Like many schools in its district, Camden School offers both regular programming and programs of choice within an open boundary system. The kindergarten through grade nine student body consists primarily of three types of communities: students from the local community, students who are bussed from a catchment area in the southeast of the city with a high percentage of recent immigrants and first generation Canadians of East Indian and Punjabi origin, and students enrolled in sports alternative programming. Students in the sports alternative program are allowed release time during the day to participate in sports training, such as hockey, gymnastics, soccer and skiing. This training is provided by independent organizations in cooperation with the school.

This study was focused on the views and understandings of writing and the teaching and learning of writing among grade six students and their parents and teachers. Grade Six was chosen as a target grade level because it represents the final year of elementary school and provided an opportunity for student responses to reflect a culmination of elementary experience with writing and writing instruction. At Camden School, grade six is also the third and final year of sports alternative programming and respondents from this program would have an equivalent exposure to similar pedagogies of writing as students in other groups at the school. Grade Six students were also chosen because of the likelihood that they would be able to understand the purposes of the study and to articulate their understandings of writing more clearly than younger students might be able to do. Since I had received approval to conduct research within my own school setting, a final reason for their selection was that Grade Six is the elementary grade farthest removed from my own division one teaching position at the school,

Data Collection

The data collection for this study took place during a six-week period in late spring. Part one of the study included the distribution and collection of information letters, consent forms and a short-answer questionnaire in three versions—parent, teacher and student. Because I was also a teacher at the school, I recruited a volunteer to facilitate distribution of survey packages. Using a prepared script, the adult volunteer, Anne[2], explained the purpose and procedures of the study to each of three grade six homeroom classes right before or after a break time pre-arranged with the homeroom teacher. [Appendix A] The explanation script included assurances that participation was voluntary for both parents and students. Anne initially distributed a total of 70 student packages and 70 parent packages to be taken home by students in each of three grade six homerooms. Parent forms included a pre-stamped, school-addressed envelop. Before the distribution of the surveys, I met with the grade six teachers to explain the purpose of the research and the survey and also emphasized the volunteer nature of participation. Eight teacher survey packages were placed in staffroom mailboxes, one for each teacher involved in teaching at least one grade six course. A response collection box was placed at the front desk in the school office and participants were also given the option of returning the surveys to Anne, through the mail, or directly to me.

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[2] All participants have been assigned pseudonyms

Analysis through Grounded Theory

Analysis of both interview and survey data was conducted within a framework of grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While some elements of a systematic approach to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) were initially used to facilitate the process of data analysis, such as the use of flow charts to examine relationships between codes as part of the constant comparative process and the use of memoing and terminology like initial coding, categories and themes, the intent and action of the study more clearly followed a constructivist approach to grounded theory. It became apparent early on that the data would not fit easily into pre-determined categories according to the axial coding phase of the systematic approach. Rather, the process of analyzing data was centered on examining "the meanings ascribed by participants in the study" (Creswell, 2005, p. 402). Charmaz (2006) makes the distinction between the more systematic grounded theory and her 'symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective" through the key idea of construction:

> In the classic grounded theory works, Glaser and Strauss talk about discovering theory as emerging from data separate from the scientific observer. Unlike their position, I assume that neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We *construct* our grounded

> theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices. (p. 10).

A key aspect of the constructivist approach to grounded theory methodology that is recognized in this study is the impact of the researcher's perspective on the choices made at each stage of the data analysis process. In this case, as a teacher conducting research toward a graduate degree within my own school context, I automatically became involved with the data. Care was taken to remove the possibility of personal impact from the results of the study as much as possible through the selection of a grade level five years removed from my current teaching position; the use of a volunteer to explain and distribute surveys; the availability of a neutral return site; and the assurance and the reassurance of the volunteer nature of participation in the study. However, the identification of myself, the researcher, as a member of the staff, especially to the student and teacher participants, must be recognized as having a possible impact on the data collected. It is also clear that my bias toward exploring certain aspects of writing and how it is taught necessarily precluded the inclusion of other aspects, which may have brought out different points of view not reflected in this study. With these considerations in mind, I acknowledge that the themes explored in this study reflect a particular study in time and place. While the results of this study provide insights into the understandings of school writing as experienced by teachers, students and parents in a grade six context, and will hopefully incite further exploration of results in other contexts, I understand that my findings are not conclusive but rather suggestive with the hope of bringing further questions to the research forum on writing and the teaching of writing in the context of the people involved.

Terms and Definitions

The term understanding, as used in this research, refers to Beck's (2006) concept of the subjective perspectives, intentions or goals of individuals. Olson (2003), building on the learning theories of John Dewey, explains the role of subjectivity in one's construction of understanding:

> The subjective side of experience thus includes the assessment one assigns to those external events in terms of the emotion or feeling or attitude produced as well as the mental content or belief constructed. The important point to note is that the feelings, emotions, and cognitions are not caused by the environment but rather are produced or generated by the experiencer; we somehow make our own emotions and cognitions. (p.127)

In addition to understanding as the individual's subjective or private beliefs, there is also the component of understanding that is socially constructed or intersubjective. Intersubjectivity, or shared understanding, "generally refers to the degree to which partners in a communicative act share the same understanding of a concept" (Beck, 2006, p.420). In exploring the understandings of students, parents and teachers about what school writing is and how it is taught, the presence of both subjective and intersubjective knowledge was considered.

This study also extends Murphy's (2000) definition of socially constructed understandings, described in terms of teacher and student co-construction of understandings about writing, to also consider these understandings in conjunction with the understandings of parents. This focus on the triangle of understanding of parents, students and teachers on the same topic is one that has limited representation in current research and is essential for developing shared understandings, or intersubjectivity, of what good writing is and how it is taught in school (Ravet, 2007).

Transcription and Presentation of Data

In order to ensure that the message of participants' responses was conveyed, I corrected punctuation, grammar and spelling errors when quoting what participants had written on their surveys. Due to the fact that surveys were completed quickly and often with brief notes rather than paragraphs, it seemed more courteous to readers to correct these small errors. Similarly, when presenting oral data from transcripted interviews, I omitted most hesitations, pauses and false starts where they did not influence the meaning of what participants were saying. These actions were done in order to present participants' ideas in a clear, respectful manner while ensuring accuracy in the representation of their thoughts.

Part One—Survey Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire, hereafter referred to as the survey, was presented in two sections and modified for each group of participants; parents, teachers and students received information letters, consent forms and survey questionnaires specific to their experiences with writing and writing instruction [Appendix B]. The first section of the survey included demographic questions such as number of years at Camden School, program or course involvement, education levels, language(s) spoken at home and transportation access to the school. Demographic questions were asked in order to identify possible trends or discrepancies in understanding that might be related to experience, program participation, length of exposure to writing programs at Camden school, frequency of interaction with teachers at the school, or possible barriers such as language or parent education level.

The second section included open-ended questions aimed at soliciting participants' perceptions and opinions of writing instruction in school as well as perceived methods for resolving issues regarding teaching pedagogy. An invitation to participate in the follow-up interviews was included in the introductory letter and was available as a choice on the consent forms. The sampling goal for surveys was equal representation from each community group within the grade six cohort.

Collection of Survey Responses

An initial deadline of two weeks was set for return of the survey questionnaires. After one week, a reminder notice was sent home with each grade six student. At the end of the first two-week data collection time, seven surveys had been returned, with all parent and student responses coming from the demographic group related to the sports alternative program. A second round of survey packages was prepared with an accompanying note explaining an extension of the deadline to allow for additional responses. Homeroom teachers distributed the second set of packages to be taken home by students. Eighteen additional surveys were returned during the next two weeks. The timing of this study, during the last two months of the school year, may have impacted the configuration and level of input of the sample participants due to the scheduling constraints characteristic of that time of year.

Recall request notification. One parent from one of the grade six homerooms raised a complaint on her returned survey that both she and her child had felt compelled to participate. As a result, these parent and student surveys (notated as S7 and P7) were returned to them and a recall notice was sent home with each student in that homeroom asking them to withdraw their survey if they had not submitted it voluntarily. [Appendix C]. Their homeroom teacher also reiterated the voluntary nature of the study to her class. No recalls were requested.

Final Tally of Survey Responses

In total, six teacher surveys, ten parent surveys, and nine student surveys were collected as admissible data at the end of a four week collection period. Survey responses were dated and numbered per collection sequence. Respondents were assigned notations based on group (S=Student, T=Teacher, P=Parent) and survey collection sequence number. For example, the third parent survey returned received the notation P3. After data analysis, each participant was then assigned a pseudonym for the purposes of reporting the findings of this study.

Three of the six teachers gave consent to be contacted for a follow-up interview as well as four of the parents and four of the students. Initial maximal variation sampling goals for interviews had been to have representation from each community group within the school. However, almost all respondents who indicated consent to be contacted for interviews were, again, connected with the sports alternative program. One of the four parents contacted did not respond to a follow-up interview request. Three of the four students were contacted and agreed to interviews. All three teachers agreed to interviews. The three teachers included two grade six language arts teachers and one grade six math and science teacher.

Initial Coding of Survey Responses

Survey responses were compiled and collated by group (student, parent, teacher), respondent notation and survey question number.

Actual study sample. I first went through the demographic data on the surveys. This coding revealed the actual sample of this study to be primarily from one community group at the school, sharing a number of other homogenous characteristics.

All student respondents were male. Eight out of nine were enrolled in the sports alternative program, while the parent of the ninth student indicated consideration of enrollment in the program in the next school year. Years of enrollment at Camden School ranged from one to three years. At least one student responded from each of the three grade six homerooms. Although there was some variance in first or second language and method of traveling to school, the factors of gender and program made the student respondents a relatively distinct, homogeneous sample.

Similarly, all but one of the parent respondents had their grade six child enrolled in sports alternative programming. The one non-sport parent was also the mother of the non-sport student respondent and was planning to enroll her son in the program in junior high. Another homogenous trait amongst parent respondents was their reported levels of education. All parent respondents reported at least some college education with two of the 10 reporting a graduate level degree. Seven out of ten parents reported driving their grade six student to school and all but one of the ten parents reported that it was usually easy to meet with teachers when they wanted to do so.

Teacher respondents, on the other hand, reflected a heterogeneous mix. Three male and three female grade six teachers responded. Years of experience ranged from one year to eleven or more years, with years at Camden School ranging from one to ten years. Three teachers held bachelor degrees, one held a bachelor degree and an education after-degree and two teachers reported master's degrees. All teachers taught heterogeneous mixes of sports program and regular program students in the mornings, while four worked exclusively with regular program students in the afternoons. Half of the teachers reported teaching language arts subject courses.

The small size and limited diversity of the sample population due to the homogenous nature of most parent and student participants in terms of school program, education levels amongst parents, and gender of student participants and parent interviewees created a limitation for this study. In his research on risk-taking in literacy learning, Bialostok (2004) described his findings in terms of the demographic of 'middle-classness' where parents who described themselves as middle-class held similar assumptions about school literacy. The demographic data from this study indicates a similar 'middle-classness' of respondents in relation to their educational level and their economic ability to pay a separate, supplemental fee in order to enroll their children in sports alternative programming. A larger sample size or wider range of social and economic diversity in the sampling may have resulted in a wider range of understandings.

Coding survey responses. I then conducted a preliminary review of survey responses via page-fold memoing, noting line by line, and sometimes word by word, incidences of ideas mentioned under each question heading. This initial review of survey responses revealed several salient trends. All groups mentioned proper conventions and conveying ideas as key elements of good writing. In general, while most parents wanted more work on grammar and conventions, such as spelling and punctuation, several students expressed a desire for less work in these areas. Student responses frequently mentioned the use of description and good vocabulary as important to good writing. Teachers' responses, overall, put more emphasis on content and ideas and were more likely to mention instructional programs such as 6+1 Writing Traits and Writing Workshop. These preliminary findings, or initial codes, from the surveys were used to develop questions for the follow-up, one-on-one interviews. Interview questions for each group were aimed at exploring in more depth how it is that we come to understand what makes writing good, how good writing is best learned and taught and what influences these perceptions. [Appendix D]

Part Two—Individual Follow-up Interviews

After the initial review of the surveys, nine interviews were conducted over a period of two weeks with three parents, three students and three teachers who indicated on their survey consent forms willingness to participate in an interview. Interviews were conducted individually in a meeting room at the school. Teachers were interviewed at their convenience. Students were interviewed during their lunch breaks. Two of the parents met for interviews during the day. A third parent was interviewed in a pre-arranged phone interview. All interviews were digitally recorded using Sound Studio software on a lap-top computer. I then transcribed each interview and provided copies to each participant for member checking. No concerns were raised by participants regarding the transcription of their interviews.

Incidences

The first stage of data analysis of interview transcripts involved noting and recording each separate idea or incidence mentioned by respondents in the interview transcriptions. Transcripts for each group were placed side-by-side as a three-column entry aligning participant's answers to each question. Initially, a phrase-by-phrase notation of ideas was recorded as incidents first via margin notes. Then, on a second examination of each transcript set, incidences were re-evaluated and written individually on separate index cards. The index cards were color coded and notated as to their sources. All incidences attributed to parents were written on green cards, incidences attributed to teachers were recorded on blue cards and those attributed to students on yellow cards. Direct or *in vivo* quotes were used as much as possible to record each incidence and sources were identified on the back of each card per data type (Q= survey (questionnaire); I-interview), question number (e.g., Q2= survey question 2; I4b= Interview Question 4, first follow-up question), and participant (e.g., P10i = Parent 10, interview).

During this stage of the data analysis, all incidences were kept in separated groups according to their source and question number. At the end of this first stage, 1009 incidences were recorded, with close to half attributed to teachers (47%), a third attributed to parents (34%) and about a fifth attributed to students (19%). This was consistent with the length of responses typical to each group in both survey responses and interviews. Teachers' responses tended to be the most lengthy, student responses were notably shortest.

Initial codes

The second stage of data analysis involved the process of grouping incidences into initial codes, or incidences that relate closely to one another. Although the approach in this part of the study is similar to what Creswell describes as the open coding phase

(2005, p. 397) of systematic grounded theory design, the systematic nature of data analysis only extended through the initial coding stage. As with the process of identifying incidences, determining codes involved extensive review of the incidence data beginning with groups of incidences separated according to source and question number. First, I analyzed incidences within each source and question number to ascertain where incidences reflected close approximation to each other and where they were distinct. At this point, each distinction was assigned an initial code. Some initial codes within these smaller groupings would include as few as one incident. After each section of the data was analyzed and assigned initial codes in this manner, the data was then reviewed again using the process of combining initial codes from different sources (participant group) and question sections with each other, beginning with the most similar sections. A process of constant comparison meant that incidences were grouped and re-grouped into initial codes as the analysis progressed. Each incidence was revisited at least three times during this initial phase. Initial codes themselves were reviewed continually throughout this study, as is consistent with open coding. The result of this iteration between data and memoing and the constant comparison during the process was the expansion of some codes into additional initial codes or combining of like codes into one category. I felt a saturation point was reached when it appeared that distinctions in the data were sufficiently accounted for and further separation or combination of incidences would not provide new initial codes. By the conclusion of this second stage of the data analysis, the initial codes had been grouped into 320 codes.

Grouping Codes into Categories

This third stage of data analysis continued the constant comparison approach. In taking a constructivist approach to grounded theory, I recognized within this stage that my understandings of current literature in the areas of attitudes toward writing and writing instruction, instructional pedagogy in writing, communication between parents and teachers and parental involvement in schools, as discussed in the previous chapter, were influential backgrounds to the analysis of codes as groups or categories.

In this phase, initial codes were examined for connections and relationships between them. Initially, the codes were analyzed for homogeneous trends that might appear based on respondents whose incidences were included in each code. One question that began this stage of analysis was whether there were differences or similarities in codes that could be attributed primarily to one of the groups--teachers, students, or parents. The beginning of the analysis was an exploration of ways of grouping codes into themes to explain the process of understanding writing that was occurring for the different groups of participants studied [Appendix E].

Preliminary trends. The first exploration of categories focused on identifying specific content areas that were exclusive, or largely exclusive to one particular group. For example, a number of codes such as "Kids don't talk about school" and "Don't see many writing assignments at home" that involved how information was gathered about writing instruction were most commonly attributed to parents. When looking at codes related to how writing is taught, there were a significant number of codes such as "Prefer writing workshop," "share writing with others" and "Seeing trouble spots," that were exclusive to teacher incidences. This was not surprising given the depth and length of teacher responses related to their particular teaching practice. The weight of teacher dominated codes that were derived from the key question, "How is Writing Taught," pointed to a discrepancy between teachers and the other respondents in terms of how particular their knowledge was of methods and procedures used in the classroom instruction of writing. This was one starting point for grouping codes into larger categories or themes.

A second consideration for categories also centered on discrepancies between participants that appeared in codes related to what parents, teachers and students thought were most and least important to learning and teaching good writing. As noted in the initial review of survey data, discrepancies in views toward conventions between teachers and parents and students were some of the most obvious trends observed in the data early on. Follow-up questions on views toward conventions were included in all three sets of semi-structured interview questions, with the goal of gaining a deeper understanding of how views on conventions and the teaching of conventions impacted respondents' understandings of writing and the teaching of writing as a whole.

A third starting point, and one of the central questions that arose during the analysis of the data was in the relationships between codes for what they indicated about types, methods and modes of participation in the communication about student learning between groups (teachers, students, parents).

First findings. Categories began to take shape through the process of grouping codes into categories with the intent of identifying a few over-arching themes. At this point in the data analysis I had established two major perspectives that expressed the means or processes involved in the construction of subjective understanding: the perspectives of belief and of observation. Within these themes, I attempted to account for remaining distinctions within the data by stepping back from the theme level to a category and sub-category level. This reflects the ongoing process consistent with grounded theory methodology in which there is an iteration of analysis from lower to higher to lower levels throughout the process. At this point, I wrote my first drafts of the Findings and Discussion sections of my thesis.

Realization of over-coding. When I began the review and revision stage of my thesis work, I realized that in an attempt to account for all of the data in my study with due rigor, I had over-coded. I had distilled the data into such distinct parts that it was difficult to see the connections between participants' statements. Although I was able to describe key issues in participants' understandings and related implications in discussion format, these were not clear from the way that the coding had been presented in my findings.

Rephrasing into categories. At this point, I revisited the initial categories that I had considered when looking at the connections between codes. In re-writing my findings chapters, I sought to communicate these connections and the categories they represented rather than focusing on the distinct, unconnected codes themselves. I presented each category in terms of the questions that generated the included data and explained the understandings expressed on that category per participant group of teachers, parents and students. While ensuring that the coded data was thoroughly represented in the findings, this method of presenting the data better demonstrated the understandings shared by participants and facilitated a more cohesive picture of the views of participants and participant groups on writing and how it is realized in school.

Chapter Four: Participants' Understandings of School Writing

The findings described in this chapter reflect the responses of parents, teachers and students to survey and interview questions designed to solicit their understandings of what good writers should be able to do, what they know about school writing and how they communicate about it. The purpose of this chapter is to present an analysis of participants' responses in order to begin to paint a picture of the ways in which the teachers, parents and students involved in this project understand school writing. Their responses describe views on writing quality, the importance of writing as a skill, and how writing is assessed. Participants explained their understandings and opinions of methods used in writing instruction in school and their expectations and experiences with communication about instruction. The experiences of participants with school writing themselves provide background for how their current understandings have been formed. Beginning with the survey and interview questions that introduced them, each section of this chapter will describe the themes that emerged from the responses of participants within each group, beginning with teachers, then parents, then students.

In the interest of clarity and readability, participants have been assigned pseudonyms that indicate their respective group: teachers have been assigned gender consistent names beginning with T, parents names with the letter P and students names with the letter S. [see Tables 1, 2 and 3]. For example, participants involved in one-on-one interviews with the researcher include three teachers, Tom, Taryn and Talia, three parents, Polly, Pam and Penny, and three students, Steven, Seth and Sam.

Table 1

Student Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Program	No. of Years at Camden	Transportation	Home Language	Will Interview
Stuart	M	Sport	1	Car/far	English	No
Sullivan	M	Sport	1	Car/far	English	No
Steven	M	Sport	3	School bus	Slovak	Yes
Stan	M	Sport	2	School bus	English/ Cantonese	No
Spencer	M	Sport	2	Car/far	Arabic	Yes
Seth	M	Sport	1	Car/near	English	Yes
Serge	M	Sport	2	Car/far	English/ French	No
Sam	M	Sport	2	School bus	English	Yes
Skylar	M	Reg.	3	Walk	English	No

Table 2

Parent Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Program	No. of Years at Camden	Transportation	Education Level	Home Language	Will Interview
Polly	F	Sport	1	Car/far	Univ. Degree	English	Yes
Patricia	F	Sport	3	Car/near	Univ. Degree	English	No
Peggy	F	Sport	2	School bus	Univ. Degree	English/ Cantonese	No
Pauline	F	Sport	1	Car/far	Some college	English	No
Peter	M	Sport	1	Car/far	Grad. Degree	English	No
Paul	M	Sport	2	Car/far	Some college	English/ French	No
Preston	M	Reg.	2	Car/far	Grad. Degree	English	Yes
Priscilla	F	Sport	2	Car/far	Univ. degree	English	No
Pam	F	Sport	2	School bus	Univ. degree	English	Yes
Penny	F	Reg.	3	Walk	Univ. degree	English	yes

Table 3

Teacher Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	No. Yrs. Teaching	No. Yrs. at Camden	AM Program	PM Program	Educ. Level	Courses Taught	Will Interview
Tom	M	11+	7-10	Mixed	Reg.	Grad. Degree	Math, Science, Other	Yes
Tony	M	1-3	1-3	Mixed	Reg.	Bach. Degree	Math, Other	No
Theo	M	1-3	1-3	Mixed	Mixed	Bach. Degree (2)	L.A, Math, Science, Soc. St., Other	No
Taryn	F	7-10	7-10	Mixed	Reg.	Bach. Degree	L.A., Soc. St., Sec. Lang., Other	Yes
Trish	F	1-3	1-3	Mixed	Sport	Bach. Degree	Math, Science, Other	No
Talia	F	11+	4-6	Mixed	Reg.	Grad. Degree	L.A, Soc. St., Second Lang., Other	Yes

Understandings of Quality in Writing

In order to build a framework of participants' understandings of school writing, I began with questions designed to find out teacher, parent and student interpretations of what it means to be a good writer, one of the primary goals of school writing instruction. In answer, participants made reference to characteristics of good writing and the value of being able to write well.

On Characteristics of Good Writing

One of the first questions on the survey was "What does it mean to be a good writer?" Participants' responses to this question centered primarily on notions of what constitutes quality in writing, both in terms of what we determine as readers and what we believe are expected norms for writing in school. Survey responses were the main venue for ideas related to characteristics of good writing. The theme reappeared a few times in relation to follow-up interview questions that asked, "Where do you think we get our understanding of good writing?" or "How do people know what good writing is?"

Teachers. Teachers' interpretations of what constitutes good writing included references to general themes of purpose, readability, engagement and insight as well as references to particular elements of writing such as fluency, organization, voice, word choice, conventions and description.

Four teachers' survey responses referred to being able to write for a variety of purposes, with explanations such as, "Write for various reasons, creative and practical" (Tom), "Able to write in different situations" (Theo), and "Keep purpose and audience in consideration" (Tony). Readability was also a commonly listed trait as in Tom's comment, "needs to be clear and understandable," and Tony's, "able to express their thoughts clearly. Theo used the word, "understandable," and Talia expressed this in the phrase, "get your ideas across." The notions of engagement and insight went hand in hand in several teachers' responses such as, "they make you want to read more and more" (Talia), "original, insightful ideas" (Trish), and "engaging" (Taryn). Engagement also re-appeared in teachers' interview responses on how people learn to write well.

Specific elements of writing that appeared in survey responses included fluency, as in, "fluent expressions" (Trish) and "allow the ideas to flow smoothly" (Theo), and organization, as in, "use a variety of structures [well]" (Tony), and "transfer your ideas from your brain to paper in good organized and understandable fashion" (Theo). Other elements that were mentioned were voice, "A good writer must be able to incorporate their own voice into their writing" (Theo), word choice, "They choose words carefully" (Taryn), and proper conventions, "Use correct conventions" (Taryn). Talia brought up description as an element of good writing, "You are a good writer if you can get your ideas across, if the reader can imagine the far off place or feel the frustrations you describe or smell the smells you are creating with your words."

Parents. In their survey and interview responses to the question of what it means to be a good writer, parents made reference to general themes of readability, clarity, engagement, description and creativity as well as references to particular elements of writing such as fluency and organization, word choice and conventions.

Several parents mentioned readability and clarity as hallmarks of good writing on surveys. They used phrases such as, "get information across to the reader" (Polly), "put thoughts on paper in a coherent manner" (Patricia), "making others understand" (Peggy), and "being a good writer is having the ability to get one's point across clearly and thoughtfully" (Priscilla). Some parents also pointed to the importance of engagement with the word "interesting" (Polly & Preston). Description and creativity were also mentioned in conjunction with clarity through the phrases, "express ideas through senses, descriptions" (Pam), "descriptive way" (Polly), and "descriptive manner" (Paul).

Specific elements of writing also appeared in parent survey responses. Organization was mentioned in terms of the flow of a text. Penny wrote that good writers "know how to keep ideas together to make your writing flow." Pauline mentioned, "A good writer is someone who can take a topic, explore that topic and use constructive sentences…to explain the topic." Other references to organization included the phrases, "well-structured" (Paul), and "focus own mind on the target of own writing" (Preston). One stand-alone phrase, "in a reasonable amount of time" (Patricia), also points to the ability of a good writer to organize her thoughts and transfer them to paper with facility.

Several parents commented on having a wide vocabulary and using it well. Pauline mentioned "creative words." Preston wrote that good writers should "have a large vocabulary and be able to use it in an interesting way." Priscilla explained, "Being a good writer means to have a greater knowledge of the language and using it creatively."

Parent survey responses on this topic also mentioned conventions. Both Patricia and Penny referred to proper spelling, grammar and punctuation. Other references to these conventions of writing included "use complete sentences" (Peter), and "use constructive sentences" (Pauline).

During the interviews, many of these themes were briefly re-iterated. Pam's response to a follow-up question on the key difference between good writing and poor writing was, "Proper grammar, description words…whether they convey their message."

Penny mentions "good vocabulary" and "flow." Participants' responses to how writing is learned also mentioned the impact of appeal on constructing definitions of good writing.

Students. Student survey responses describing what good writers can do brought out characteristics of clarity, engagement, and description. They also wrote about particular elements of writing such as sentence fluency, organization, word choice and conventions. Students described clarity as being able "to be accurate with a movie or book [report], and to make sense" (Spencer) and to "get information" (Stuart). Interest and reader engagement were mentioned in student comments such as, "write interesting stories" (Steven), "keep the reader interested" (Stan), and "make the story interesting so the reader will be anxious to find out what happens next" (Serge). Several students also mentioned description in "use descriptive words" (Sam), "very descriptive" (Sullivan), and "to be a good writer means to be creative in his words" (Spencer).

Students also mentioned more specific elements of writing. Skylar wrote, "Have good sentence fluency," explained in Sam's comments as "different starts for sentences" and "different lengths of sentences." Students mentioned organization in the phrases, "Have an introduction, have a problem, have a solution" (Serge), and "a good writer is a writer that has organized writing" (Stuart). Sullivan mentioned the importance of choosing the right words as did Spencer with, "Be creative in his words." Students expressed a correlation between good writing and good conventions in a number of areas. Skylar mentioned "good spelling," and "good punctuation." Sam included, "no grammar mistakes" and "variety of punctuation." Sullivan and Serge also mentioned punctuation. Serge wrote, "No spelling mistakes."

During their interviews, Sam, Seth and Steven talked about many of these characteristics again when asked how they discerned the difference between good and poor writing. Seth reiterated the fact that good writing, "makes sense," and "has a story line." He also mentioned accurate spelling, as did Sam. Steven and Sam both used the phrase, "good words" and alluded to capturing reader's interest with "descriptive words" (Sam) and "you can tell that it's fun" (Steven).

On the Importance of Good Writing

A topic that came up briefly during interviews with mixed perspectives was the relevance of being able to write well.

Teachers. Of the three teachers interviewed, Taryn was the one who brought up this topic during her interview. She questioned the importance of writing skills in the current provincial job market and wondered if there is a danger of parents either overemphasizing the importance of writing or not emphasizing it enough. She began with, "I think so much of it in our climate, in [our province] is economics-based, whether parents want to be involved in their kid's education or whether they don't, whether they think, 'ah, education, whatever.'" She went on to explain, "I think other people would think, oh, they couldn't [get a job without writing], so then there's a real push not to realize that kids might have other aptitudes besides writing." Taryn added this resignation, "Your kid doesn't have to be a good writer to be lots of things in life that will make way more money than lots of educated people will ever make." She described the conflict between desiring students to have the writing skills they need and not wanting their level of writing skill to make them feel limited in their future choices.

Parents. Pam expressed her thoughts that learning to write well is essential in equipping students for higher education:

> I think kids need to learn how to write an introduction, the body of a paragraph and a conclusion because down the road, that's what they're going to get graded on whether its junior high, high school or university….so kids need to learn it now rather than later.

Students. Both Sam and Seth referred to writing well as an essential skill. In response to how important it is to understand how writing is being taught and why the teacher is doing it that way, Sam answered, "It's very important because it's a life skill, right? You need for your whole life to read and write. If you can't write then you pretty much can't really go through life." Seth's answer was very similar, "It's important because you need to learn how to read and write, because if you won't be able to do it, you wouldn't be able to do lots of stuff. Most, I think, in life is reading and writing."

All three interviewed students wondered if parents might value education more than students do, therefore pushing them to develop better writing skills. When asked why parent and student opinions might differ on the importance convention work, Sam replied, "Maybe some students are lazy," and coupled that with, "parents want their kids to be good at writing [for] the future." The other two students' responses were very similar, "Because parents want children to learn and the children don't want to learn sometimes" (Steven), and "Most kids don't like having lots of education and the parents want them to have an education" (Seth).

Understandings of The Impact of Experience on Perceptions of School Writing

In the surveys, participants were asked for their definitions of what good writers are able to do and how school activities facilitate growth of these skills. During follow-up interviews, I set out to explore how participants' own experiences with school writing contributed to their current understandings. I opened the interviews with the statement, "The parents, teachers and students who responded to the surveys expressed many of the same definitions of what a good writer can do." I then asked relevant variations of the following questions: Where do you think we get our understanding of what good writing is? How can you tell the difference between good writing and poor writing? What do you remember about writing when you were in elementary school?

On Interpretations of How Writing Is Learned

Two themes emerged from participants' discussions of how they have come to define good writing. The connection between reading and writing was frequently mentioned, as was the notion that good writing is a product of school instruction.

Teachers. All three teachers alluded to the impact of personal reading, or reading to others, on their perceptions of what good writing is. In Tom's words, "People form opinions from their own reading, probably specifically novels, or children's books if they're reading with their kids all the time." All three also mentioned engagement as a key factor in determining good writing. Tom and Talia described engagement as enjoying what you read. Taryn suggested that people who read a lot form a different idea of good writing from those who do not "because maybe they read to be entertained and so they get the sense that writing has that purpose, too."

Taryn stated that notions of good writing were "mostly school driven," especially for people who do not read a lot. Talia provided the caveat that reading is likely the primary source of understandings about good writing "if your job doesn't involve writing or you're not a student at university or teacher." Taryn's comments also described the practical type of writing related to university enrollment, jobs or everyday activities like grocery lists and resumes but pointed out, "I don't necessarily think kids would be aware of that idea of writing." She further explains with the comment, "Either you think of it as a thing you do in school or a thing that you do because you are paid like a writer. When they think of a writer they think of fiction or books."

Parents. In the interviews, all three parents began with the connection between reading and knowledge of aspect of good writing. Polly started, "I guess judging from what I like to read," and Pam expanded with, "What authors we like to read." All three described the role that affect plays in deciding what writing is good. Penny explained:

> It's reading and deciding—you kind of get a sense of it if it appeals to you or not or flows or doesn't flow so you can get an idea of, 'okay, this is good writing because it's got elements of intrigue, that keep your interest, and good vocabulary and maybe it has humor or whatever you like to see.'

Description and ease of reading came into play in Pam's and Polly's explanations of appeal as well. Polly stated that she disliked "repetitive things" and gave the example of a Danielle Steele novel in which every sentence begins the same way. Pam explained her perception of good writing as including proper grammar, but also as by, "whether you can see a picture or not of what the person is writing about, whether you understand what they're writing about, whether they convey their message."

Pam was the one parent who stated, "I would say you have to study it in school."

Students. During interviews, students were also asked how they thought people knew what good writing was. Much of their response reiterated qualities of good writing, similar to those mentioned on the surveys. Reading and school were mentioned briefly as determining agents. Sam stated that people could learn what good writing is if they "research it" or "learn it at school." He also stated, "Maybe learn it at home if you do phonics or something." Steven likewise said that we learn what good writing is from "teachers mostly" and added, "Then, if you want to do it, you just like, learn."

Steven noted the connection between reading and knowledge of good writing, "If you can tell that its fun and it has good words and things like that, if you want to read it." Similarly, Sam and Seth stated that good writing included the right spelling, "good sentence flow" (Sam) and description. Seth explained that good writing was believable to some extent "because if you have it just made up, it's not good. If you have a made up story you can have some stuff that's made up and some stuff that's real." He later explained that poor writing, "might have a conflict but they don't have a solution for it."

On the Impact of One's School Experiences on Beliefs About School Writing

Participants reflected on experiences that evoked emotions and the ways these experiences impacted their current understandings about school writing when they were asked about positive and negative memories of writing in school.

Teachers. Tom, Talia and Taryn all reported mixed experiences with writing in school. Tom said that he saw himself as a good reader but in general "not a very good writer." He stated, "I liked writing about finding out about things," but when it came to creative writing, he described it as being "like somebody put up a sign right in front of my face." When asked about the impact of this experience on him over time, he replied that, "for my occupation, it definitely had an impact as to which area I focused on," referring to his specialization in math and science instead of language arts.

Taryn and Talia shared similar experiences in a few areas. Both came from a French immersion background and found that their ability to spell in English suffered. Taryn explained, "I came from French immersion and my spelling remains atrocious to this day…spelling was always a frustration." She went on to relate experiences of being penalized for her spelling in high school:

> I can remember, I went and did some upgrading for high school and I would fail papers based on spelling alone because that's how they were marked. I had teachers that took five marks off for every spelling mistake until you got zero.

Later on, Taryn explains that this event did not dampen her enjoyment of writing or belief in her own writing ability due in part to encouragement from her teacher mother, "I guess my mom always helped me always remember that spelling isn't what makes you smart."

Talia's difficulty with writing and spelling in English was compounded by dyslexia, which was not formally diagnosed until University. She described the strategies she has relied on to compensate for her difficulty with spelling:

> [S]pelling was always an issue and it still is. I always double-check everything. I use a dictionary really quickly. Spell-check is wonderful on the computer. I've learned to cope.

Both language arts teachers also mentioned handwriting. For Taryn it "was always a frustration," but Talia described using feather pens for handwriting and said, "Ecriture was my favorite thing in elementary school."

Despite the challenges they faced, Taryn and Talia also spoke about positive experiences. In addition to enjoying the act of handwriting, Talia expressed enjoyment of grammar exercises, "Writing sentences, analyzing sentences, I loved that." She explained that she neither enjoyed nor did a lot of story writing or creative writing "like I do with the kids here." It was not until she began graduate studies that Talia "became a much better writer and then I loved it."

Taryn began her answer with the phrase, "I always loved writing." Her reasons for loving writing centered on moments when she received affirmation for her compositions, whether they were spelled correctly or not, "I think I loved it because I felt successful." She went on to explain, "I don't mean 90%'s and 80%'s and things but I can remember the teacher sharing my stories out loud or being excited about the writing that I did." Taryn also received affirmation in her writing ability from her mother who, "whether she lied or whether she was honest, always said, 'oh, you're such a good writer'." Later on she described this as "moments of having my work embraced."

Parents. Penny, Polly and Pam each responded to my question of what their experiences with writing were like in school with positive memories. When asked if they remembered any negative experiences, Penny replied, "No, I always felt good about school in general," and Pam stated, "I always enjoyed to write. I liked writing. I liked the opportunity to write…I never had any bad memories of writing."

Their memories of specific activities related to writing included references to grammar classes, story writing, poetry and writing in other subject areas. Both Penny and Pam stated that they did not remember a lot about their writing in elementary school, but one thing that stood out for both of them were grammar classes. Pam specifically remembered, "Every Friday afternoon we'd do two hours of grammar." When I reacted with surprise she said, "yeah, but you know, I've never forgotten it." Penny also mentioned remembering, "spelling and spelling tests." Pam and Penny both also remembered story writing. Penny mused on how happy she was when "this one teacher let us do creative writing finally" after all of the essays she recalled in high school. Polly liked "writing poetry" but primarily remembered non-fiction types of writing like the reports that she completed in other subject areas "like social studies."

Students. I began this section of the students' interviews by asking for examples of good experiences they had had with writing at school. The positive experiences described by the boys were all related to a writing assessment of some kind. Steven and Sam both mentioned feeling like their writing work on the recent writing portion of the PAT [Provincial Achievement Exam] went well. In Sam's words, "I had to do a paper article of something in our writing thing and I think it was pretty good writing for me." Steven felt his PAT writing samples was good "because it had lots of descriptive words and was fun to read." Seth did not mention the PAT but described his good memory of writing: "I don't know when it was, but we were writing stories and we had to write every part of a story and I got a full percentage mark on it."

I then asked Sam, Seth and Steven if they had had any bad experiences with writing in school. Steven and Seth stated that they did not have any bad memories of writing in school. Sam related his experience in French immersion as a negative writing memory because "I had to do writing and I wasn't good at French so I got English words in there. Yeah, a bunch of bad French memories."

Understandings of Methods of Instruction in Writing

The majority of survey questions were designed to find out what participants thought was occurring in the instruction of writing in school. Introductory questions included: How do you think writing is taught in school? What activities do you do in school to help you learn to write well? How do these activities help you to become a better writer? What kind of writing program do you use at school?

Supporting questions asked participants what they liked about current school practice, what they thought should be emphasized more and what should be emphasized less. Teachers were also specifically asked what they believed were the strengths and areas for growth in their own writing programs. Since writing workshop and 6+1 Writing Traits were both mentioned with some frequency on surveys, these methods were singled out for further exploration in follow-up interviews.

On 6 + 1 Writing Traits as a School Writing Program

The 6+1 Writing Traits method was mentioned by most of teachers and a few students as a program used at Camden school. There was one parent reference to 6+1 Writing Traits on the surveys. This was pursued as an important topic in the interviews since the 6+1 Traits program had been a school focus in the months preceding the survey. In the interviews, teachers were asked how this program looked in their own classroom practice. Parents and students were asked for more details regarding what they understood about this program and its use as part of school writing instruction.

Teachers. Four of the six teachers listed the use of 6+1 Writing Traits in their survey response to "What kind of writing program do you use at school?" Two teachers referred to defending "the program" if questioned by parents on writing instruction.

Their statements points to defense of the school-wide initiative to implement 6+1 Writing Traits. Theo explained that he would "re-assure them of our school focus and draw on the positives of the program and make sure they understand what the focus is and what we are doing to achieve this." Trish stated that she would "do my best to explain the advantages to having a writing program."

6+1 Writing Traits as a school program also came through in teacher responses on the strengths and weakness of programs used and what was most important in school writing instruction. Theo's comments, "The whole school is focused on the program and there is a lingo that all students are familiar with," and, "The most important part is the school-wide knowledge base that has grown and the accountability it puts on our students" revealed his view of 6+1 as a strength. Trish wrote, "The strengths are that it's very structured in how it's taught. Lessons are clearly laid out for each step and it's easy to use it in other areas of the curriculum." Teacher survey responses show 6+1 Writing Traits to be a salient part of teachers' understandings of school writing instruction.

During our follow-up interviews, Taryn and Talia were asked for more specific details about their implementation of 6+1 Writing Traits through the question, "What do these approaches look like in your classroom?" Tom was asked, "How would you describe how you approach writing in subject areas other than language arts? While all three mentioned incorporating the program into their pedagogy to some extent, none of the teachers used it exclusively or expressed a belief that it served as their primary teaching tool.

In his subject area work, Tom confessed, "I find it difficult to take some of the 6+1 things and actually try to incorporate them as example lessons in my class." He described his efforts to incorporate elements of organization and presentation into student project work, which he thought "still hit the 6+1 idea."

Talia began her description of the use of 6+1 Writing Traits with the comment, "6+1 is, I find it, kind of labor-intensive and, you know, we had to do it this year." She explained how she included 6+1 by spending a few weeks throughout the term working through a trait, especially as it fit with current literature studies. However, Talia stated that both she and her students found 6+1 "a little structured."

Taryn explained, "I use writing traits but more, at this point, as a marking guide." In contrast to Talia, Taryn had not "spent a lot of the really creative time, like other teachers have, using books for this type of area of the traits or whatever."

Parents. Penny, who has an education degree and had worked as a substitute teacher in the past, was the only parent to mention the Traits program on her survey. In response to, "What do you appreciate about the way writing is taught at school?" she wrote, "I like that lots of opportunity to write is given and that the 6+1 writing traits are taught." Though Pam and Polly had not mentioned 6+1 Writing Traits on their surveys, I used the interviews to ask all three parents about 6+1 and to explore why this had not appeared on their surveys.

It was clear from their interview responses that the surveys accurately reflected their limited understandings of 6+1 Writing Traits. Polly stated, "I think I saw a bulletin board about it at the school." Pam thought she might have seen examples of 6+1 Traits:

> I know Sam [her son] has brought home stories where he's learned a technique in class and tried to use it in his story, or certain words that he's learned in his

> vocabulary that he's put into the story. So if that's one of the traits, I've seen him do that.

Parents were aware of 6+1 Writing Traits but had little knowledge of what it entailed.

Students. Two students mentioned 6+1 in their survey responses to the question, "What activities do you do in school to help you learn how to write well?" When asked about the program in follow-up interviews, student responses were limited in scope. Sam's partial understanding was demonstrated in his statement, "6+1 writing traits are sentence fluency, phonics, presentation, all that." Neither Steven nor Seth were able to name a trait or provide any further information about the Traits program.

On the Inclusion of Writing Workshop and Process Stages

Understandings of Writing Workshop were often closely intertwined with process stages of writing. While teachers contributed the most to the discussion of writing workshop, students and parents exhibited some understanding of its elements.

Teachers. On her survey answer to the question of "What kind of writing program do you use at school," Talia listed Writing Workshop along with a number of other programs or tools. Taryn's response, "Writer's workshops, primarily. Lots of writing by choice—then taken through the process (D1, SE, D2, PE—final draft)," was later interpreted from her interview responses as meaning draft one, self-edit, draft two, peer-edit and final draft.

Other survey responses reveal elements of a process-oriented approach not explicitly tied into writing workshop. Tony wrote, "I tend to use a student based approach that asks students to become aware of their style and areas of weakness." Tony later added, "I would like to become better at creating an efficient writing and revision process that keeps student motivated to be a great writer (by their standards and their grade level expectations)." In listing her strengths, Taryn wrote, "Elements of choice allow students the chance to write about things that interest them," and later stated that the most important part of her program was "practice writing, practice feedback (honest, peer and teacher), practice refining." One response that was difficult to categorize was Trish's statement that "the most important part of our program is teaching students a multi-step approach to all aspects of writing." While many of her previous comments equated 'program' with 6+1 Writing Traits, this statement indicates an inclusion of process approach steps within her understandings.

When asked for details of how writing workshop looked in their classrooms, both Talia and Taryn stated that it was their preferred mode of instruction. Each provided very detailed explanations of how their writing workshop and process approach elements were conducted in their classrooms. Both began with an idea stage, either teacher-provided or student generated, which then moved into either independent or shared planning. Multiple drafts and peer and teacher feedback also came out as important elements of their writing instruction. Taryn explained:

> I usually do my creative writing workshops once a week for an hour—in a month they would then select one of those pieces to take further into the writing process. So, some peer-edit, some revision, some typing and then some hand-in for marks. So they don't hand everything in for marks, but by the end they have a lot of first drafts that they can select from if they choose to take that story into hand in quality.

Talia mentioned a similar framework for her workshop, which included an important peer element, "They read each other's pieces, if they want them to. They help them choose which one they think is best. Then they will decide if they want to turn it into an article or a report or a story." Talia used student drafts as a way to "see the process" but pointed out that some students struggled with allowing her to see their drafts because they "have trouble letting go and just letting me see that" rather than hand-in quality work.

Both teachers also mentioned the importance of a dedicated span of time for student writing. Taryn stated, "I usually get 20-30 minutes sustained writing out of them." Talia explained her dedicated writing time:

> We have specific rules: no talking, no going to the bathroom, no sharpening pencils, don't disturb others…and I try, most of the time to write with them….[T]he whole point of writer's workshop with them is free-flow writing. There's no wrong writing. Don't worry about spelling. Don't worry about sentences. Just, here's the idea and write.

Though they admitted that the silent aspect of their writing blocks was not always achievable, both teachers held to the importance of providing uninterrupted writing time for composing texts.

Both Taryn and Talia also felt that writing workshop was a favorite activity of students and placed emphasis on the involvement of peers in the process. Taryn described her impression that students enjoy writing workshop in this way:

> There's some [students] that will be like, 'please don't take that time away from us again this week' if I took it away for reviewing social or something…or 'Do

> we get writing this week? Do we get writing this week?' You know, they look forward to that time.

Talia described her perception that students particularly enjoy her writing projects early in the year that are "all about them."

Parents. Parent survey responses to "How do you think writing is taught in school?" included some aspects of writing instruction that would be consistent with writing workshop or process oriented writing stages. Patricia mentioned, "A wholistic approach with an emphasis on content." Penny's survey response included the phrase, "Practice writing and editing activities." Writing workshop itself was not mentioned by name on parent surveys.

During the interviews, all three parents admitted to a limited understanding of writing workshop. Penny mentioned knowledge of some elements consistent with writing workshop when she said, "I know that there are all these, some mechanics, editing and all that sort of thing, but just a general sense of it."

Students. Two students, Sam and Skylar, mentioned writing workshop by name in their survey responses to, "What activities do you do in school to help you learn how to write well?" Students also mentioned elements of writing workshop and process stages in answer to how writing activities helped them and to questions of what they would like to do more or less of during writing classes. The notion of practice writing, similar to a notion of draft, was mentioned several times as, "Practice" (Sullivan) and, "Help me practice my writing—practice makes perfect" (Sam). Sullivan mentioned editing stages, "Proofread. Edit," which he later mentioned as things he would like to do less of in writing class. Similarly, Stan wrote, "Just writing instead of reviewing punctuation, etc." Serge mentioned planning as a stage in his statement, "Less explaining of what to do if we've already done it before, so we get more planning."

In interviews, students were asked if they knew what writing workshop was since many teachers mentioned using it. Steven replied that he had never done writing workshop. Sam's description of writing workshop was more detailed:

> [W]riter's workshop is when you write a story every single Wednesday and then you sometimes do a good copy. Yeah, sometimes you review and you make a good copy and you put it on the wall for people to look at.

Sam's went on to share his opinion on decreasing the frequency of workshop:

> It's a good idea, but sometimes it gets a little boring if you do it every single Wednesday and then you just get bored of it. You run out of ideas for what to do. Like every second Wednesday would be better.

From student responses, it appears that students may recognize elements related to writing workshop and process approach but aside from Sam and Skylar, students in this study did not recognize writing workshop by name.

On Other Writing Programs and Approaches

In response to questions on approaches to writing instruction that were used or observed, participants also mentioned some elements of writing instruction that were not directly related to 6+1 Writing Traits or Writing Workshop.

Teachers. Two teachers mentioned general approaches to their writing instruction. Tony wrote, "I tend to use a student based approach." Talia described her approach as "very eclectic," explaining, "I throw all kinds of different things at them." Other specific examples of instructional elements included Talia's reference to 'Pushing the Pencil' and the use of "graphic organizers for functional writing." Taryn cited written responses, explaining, "Bottom line, students are always writing their ideas down."

Parents. Several parents answered questions on methods of writing instruction by referring to specific writing projects. In Polly's words, "I have seen my son's writing projects which have included: the different parts of a story, a detailed book report, newspaper article, and writing a story based on a picture." Priscilla mentioned that her son "had a social project which he wrote."

Two parents mentioned elements of teaching practice that would occur in the classroom. Penny wrote, "Modeling sentence and paragraph form. Vocabulary and spelling practice and activities. Practice writing and editing activities," and Pauline mentioned, "Through spelling, printing, handwriting, language arts in learning verbs [or] the difference between nouns and verbs, sentence structure." Peter provided the succinct response, "Read and answer questions," joined by Pam's, "Through examples." Paul added the statement, "I['m] hoping by a qualified English teacher."

Several parents responded to this survey question with limited or negative views of the instruction of writing at school with the comments, "I do not know it" (Preston), "Not good. I do not see my child having much writing assignments" (Peggy) and "From what I see, my son rarely brings writing homework home" (Priscilla).

Students. When students were asked about the activities they did in school to help them learn how to write well, their responses included references to a few specific activities or products. Sullivan and Steven mentioned writing stories. Seth mentioned "reading books and other projects around the books." Reading was also mentioned by Serge, but the majority of his answer revolved around standardized tests, "L.A. P.A.T, HLAT, practice L.A. P.A.T.," which refers to the Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test and the school district's Highest Level of Achievement Test in writing.

On Perceptions of Strength and Weakness in Writing Instruction

On surveys, participants were asked for their opinions on the strengths and weaknesses in the teaching of writing at Camden School. Teachers were asked what the strengths were in their current writing program and where they saw areas for growth. Parents were asked what they appreciated about how writing was being taught, and what they would like to see emphasized more or less. Students were similarly asked how the current writing instruction helped them become better writers and what they would like to do more or less of during writing classes.

Teachers. Several teachers described their strengths as related to specific writing programs such as 6+1 Writing Traits and Writing Workshop. One teacher, Tony, mentioned that his strength "lies in the methodical and formative development of a finished product."

Teachers provided several comments on areas for growth in their instruction of writing. Time and efficiency were strong themes. Talia mentioned, "Improve—increase the amount of time spent on writing." Taryn stated, "I would like to have more time for writing, responding to their writing (to each other's too) and marking writing. Faster turn around on higher volume if I could stand it." Tony also mentioned efficiency, "I would like to become better at creating an efficient writing and revision process."

Tom wrote about strengths and areas for growth specific to writing in his subject areas. "I generally feel my instruction in this area is very weak," but that he did "teach and use vocabulary for both math and science" and included written projects in science.

Teacher responses to the question of what was most important in the teaching of writing included references to "adequate practice" (Tony) and "exposure, time to all kinds of writing. The more they write the better they get" (Talia). The connection between reading and writing was also introduced with, "Good reading samples" (Tony), and "Reading writing" (Taryn).

Trish answered the question of what was least important with, "the least important part would be...I don't think there is one!" Others mentioned that structure and details, including convention work, were least important. Trish, who earlier stated that one of the strengths of her program was its structure, later conceded, "The least important is structure—although it is fairly laid out, it does hinders creativity." Tony's response referred to standardized tests and technology, "Least—HLAT's (more a school grade than a learning tool)—using computers to type and power point."

Parents. When parents were asked what they appreciated about the way writing is taught at school, positive answers included references to variety, creativity and practice. Polly wrote, "I think there is a good variety in different writing styles." Creativity was a theme in two responses, "It will show creative skills to children" (Peggy) and, "It is creative and has interesting assignments" (Patricia). "Lots of practice" (Pam) and "lots of opportunity to write" (Penny) rounded out this group of responses.

Five parent responses to what they appreciated about current school instruction in writing could be interpreted as neutral or negative. Peter and Paul left their responses blank. Preston and Priscilla wrote, "NA," usually understood to stand for 'Not Applicable." Pauline's comment began with, "There is not enough emphasis on writing in school, however," she adds, "I like to see the encouragement of the use of dictionaries." Pam's reply to another question also fit this theme, "Weak. Do not develop enough writing techniques and styles."

Several parents made reference to increased work on conventionsin response to the question, "What would you like to see emphasized more in school writing instruction?" Other preferences for more emphasis included "more options of what to write about" (Peggy), "writing clearly, making your point" (Priscilla), and "consistency within the school between teacher expectations." Peter began with, "Purpose. Students need a purpose to write," then added, "The journaling is not writing. I want to see more formal writing taught in schools." Preston makes a similar comment about the need for more direct instruction in writing, "It is hard for me to say it, but those instructions should be consistently given to kids to write frequently throughout elementary school."

Students. Student opinions of writing instruction tended to range from neutral, including blank responses, to positive. Several students saw positive effects of instruction on their growth as writers: "The way they teach writing is okay" (Stuart), "Makes my writing more fluent. Makes my writing more descriptive words in my stories" (Skylar), "They teach me to keep my writing organized and use good words" (Stuart), and "I like how it is taught by having us read a book and we have to do a book report" (Spencer).

Several student responses were unique to their group. Stuart's request, "I would like to write news articles" began the list. Students also mentioned more stories (Sullivan and Skylar), "more written reports" (Spencer), and more "fun activities" (Steven). The list of things students wanted to do less included less handwriting, less work at home, less reading and less handouts.

On the Contention Over Conventions

The conventions of writing, including spelling, grammar and punctuation, appeared in survey responses but in very different ways. Mention of conventions occurred in response to almost every survey question, most notably under "What does it mean to be a good writer?" and questions asking what was liked or should be emphasized more or less. One key difference arose in parents' and students' views on conventions. Therefore, for the follow-up interviews, I created questions that followed this statement: "In general, parents said that more school time should be spent on teaching spelling, punctuation and grammar but some students said they wanted to do less of these." Teachers were asked for their reaction, students and parents were asked why their opinions might differ. Parents were also asked for clarification of what they considered to be recognizable convention work. I asked students if they thought they could be good at both conventions and ideas and asked parents and teachers if they thought emphasis on both conventions and writing process work could be compatible.

Teachers. Teacher responses to "What does it mean to be a good writer?" included references to accurate convention work as shown through clarity and readability via "a good, organized and understandable fashion" (Theo), "fluent expressions" (Trish), and being "clear and understandable" (Tom). Taryn mentioned conventions explicitly. Conventions appeared again in response to, "What do you see as the least important parts of a school writing program?" Tom wrote, "At younger ages-all the details-when to use which punctuation (commas, semi or colons, etc.)." Talia stated simply, "spelling," and Taryn hinted at convention work like spelling units with, "Parts done in isolation." Trish wrote, "The least important is structure."

In response to parent survey emphasis on convention work, teachers' reactions revealed a possible rift between teacher and parent perspectives on spelling, grammar and punctuation. Tom's response was, "Well, those things are always nice, but when I think of the math/science perspective on that, to me it's not the most important. What's most important is understanding the ideas." Talia pointed out that conventions may stand out to parents because "its much simpler to look at, 'is it right or wrong'," compared with interpreting the quality of ideas. Taryn began her response with the statement, "I think they are wrong. I think that it's the least important part." She explained how this applies to student writing, "I think about good writers and I don't think of-and I've seen kids like this before-perfect ability to use quotation marks and commas and everything, but their stories will bore you to tears," and added a comment about real authors, "You can pay someone to edit your work and still be a published author. You don't need perfect conventions." Talia explained her approach, "The conventions and grammar aspect we do-I put more emphasis on those [than spelling] because you're going to need them continuously." Earlier she stated that she does do spelling units or spelling work integrated with vocabulary but that she does not "put a lot of emphasis on the 12/12 on the spelling test per se" which follows along with her statement, "I hate spelling tests. I hate spelling, but it's not a bad exercise in terms of memorizing and focusing on the meaning of the word, the root word and building vocabulary." She admitted that one of her reasons for doing spelling units, "It's also down time for me. It's not a lot of prep time." Taryn mentioned doing some spelling work in isolation for the first time that year and stated that she liked it "because it was a lot of alphabetical order and homonyms/ synonyms, which you don't always have time to do when you do other things" but expressed her feeling, "Given my own philosophy I'd probably skip conventions altogether." Although Taryn felt that most students' ability with conventions "comes and grows over time," she expressed concern about gaps in some students' abilities, "I'm surprised how much some kids can't spell." Taryn noted that she might be at odds with other teachers on this issue: "I have some colleagues that would say those [conventions] in [grades] six and seven should be paramount."

I then asked Tom, Taryn and Talia about their views on the compatibility of emphasis on process and ideas with work on conventions. Their answers varied but all pointed to some form of integration of convention work within the process approach. Tom felt that they could be a natural fit:

> Oh, I think definitely. I think when you're giving a student feedback, whether the feedback is creative, or organizational or otherwise, I think that with that, suggestions for conventions, you know, 'here's a good place to start a new paragraph' or 'try to think about how the person would be saying this. There should be a comma in this spot or an exclamation mark here.'

Taryn explained how peer-revision often becomes a forum for convention work even if, as a teacher, that is not her preference for their focus:

> When kids peer-edit they really—I, personally, as a teacher, want them focused on content. I want them to tell the person if it made sense or if it didn't make sense—but generally, I find that they mostly point out each other's spelling mistakes and their convention mistakes. And, I think they show their understanding of conventions through that and they also earn to recognize it better in someone else's work.

Both Taryn and Talia addressed parent concern over conventions. Taryn explained that the peer-work that students were doing related to convention editing "actually does meet the need of parents." Talia explained that her emphasis was on creative aspects of writing but "often parents want more, 'this is a noun. This is a verb.'...and you can only do so much of that." Like earlier concerns over lack of time for writing instruction, Talia defended the lack of time spent on that type of convention work, "I loved that stuff [grammar]. I would do more. But there's not enough time."

The influence of technology on spelling was approached differently by Tom and the two language arts teachers. Tom mentioned a concern that current forms of writing technology de-emphasize proper conventions, "Considering how they do email and chat and things like that where no conventions are really available, I think that it's something that students definitely need to be aware of." Talia and Taryn mentioned the use of technology as an assistant with conventions. Earlier in the interview, Talia spoke about her own struggles with dyslexia and her current reliance on spell-check to assist her. In responding to this question, she added, "You can always look up your spelling in a dictionary. You can always use spell-check on the computer, so to me that's not quite as important." Taryn included a positive reference to the use of spell-check as evidence of growth as a writer, saying, "you start to realize, when you're sharing more and more your emails or whatever, that, you know, 'I better use spell check.'"

Tom and Talia echoed Taryn's comment on hoping that students will naturally grasp conventions over time. Tom stated, "With the older kids, you would almost hope that the conventions of using capitals and things would be natural." Talia likewise used the word 'hope' when she said, "As they write, those things will, hopefully, fix themselves to a certain degree, because they talk correctly. Their grammar is, most of them, accurate, so hopefully it will translate onto the paper."

Parents. Parent mention of spelling, grammar and punctuation appeared in answers to four different survey categories: "What does it mean to be a good writer?" "How do you think writing is taught in school?" and the questions of what parents would like to see emphasized more or less in school writing instruction. In general, parents valued proper conventions and wanted these to be strong foci in writing instruction.

In relation to being a good writer, parent comments on conventions included references to spelling, punctuation and grammar specifically as well as through phrases such as, "Use complete sentences" (Peter). Conventions appeared a few times in response to how parents thought writing was taught in school. Pauline responded, "Through spelling, printing, handwriting, language arts in learning verbs or the difference between nouns and verbs. Sentence structure." Penny wrote, "Modeling sentence and paragraph form. Vocabulary and spelling practice and activities. Practice writing and editing activities."

These observations matched a number of comments that appeared in response to what parents would like to see emphasized more. Four parents mentioned conventions specifically through lists like, "grammar, punctuation, correct spelling" (Patricia) and "conventions" (Penny) and through belief statements such as, "I believe there should be strong emphasis on grammar and proper sentence structure" (Polly) and "I feel there is not enough emphasis on spelling. I would like to see more spelling tests, even in grade six" (Pauline). A few parents made reference to more direct instruction in writing skills as captured by Peter's comment, "I want more formal writing taught in schools."

The issue of technology as a negative in the area of convention work appeared both in surveys and in interviews. Peter's response to what a good writer can do included the phrase, "Get rid of text messaging crap." He later mentioned, "Less computers. No more spell-check and grammar check." During the interviews, Polly talked about the challenge that writing technologies present, "I think students now, who are doing MSN and all that, that [conventions] is not important at all, so they probably don't see the importance of it," and later, "Its not even real words anymore. It's like their own little language." She also stated, "People just assume that the computer will fix spelling and that kind of thing. I still think you have to know that stuff."

In interviews, when asked why student and parent opinions on the value of convention work differed, Polly replied, "Parents are still from the school where that's all that was taught." Penny echoed, "We come from the generation of spelling and grammar and they [students] don't," When asked to elaborate, she explained:

> I think things have really changed since we went to school and what we focused on—I think those things are important because when I look at some of the writing my kids do, I think, 'okay, this isn't grammatically correct and this spelling isn't spelled right.

Pam pointed to the possibility that many recently immigrated parents at Camden school would value components of strong instruction, saying, "If you look at the demographics of the school, you're going to have a lot more parents whose English is their second language so they want their kids to learn how to speak English properly." However, Pam went on to say that she wasn't sure that "reading and writing grammar is the way to teach it," emphasizing instead that it should be taught through everyday talk.

Polly and Penny both mentioned perceptions that their children were not demonstrating a strong grasp of how to apply proper conventions to writing. Penny referred to her impression that teachers don't encourage students to worry about conventions and asked, "Should you worry or not worry about it? And when do you start worrying about it?" Likewise, Polly cited her son's difficulty with transferring his aptitude on spelling tests to his writing assignments, explaining, "I know he knows that, but when he's doing the whole writing project, that's when it all goes out the window."

I asked the parents what they would consider to be work focused on conventions. All three mentioned spelling units and spelling tests, which Pam prefaced with, "I know kids hate spelling tests." Polly mentioned that she "didn't really see much of any other grammar" or things like that. Pam re-iterated that grammar instruction should be taught "through everyday language." Both Polly and Penny repeated their concerns that part of teaching conventions needs to involve transfer to regular writing, as Penny put it, "not just on the Friday quiz."

When I asked them if they thought parent goals for convention work were at odds with teacher goals for developing ideas and emphasizing process, they responded that convention and process or idea work "sort of have to work in conjunction with each other" (Polly). Polly went on to point out that this was key in "transferring the skills [a student] has into actually writing paragraphs." Penny mentioned achieving a "happy balance" and pointed out that if students do not have a basic understanding of grammar, they would not be able to catch errors during the editing stages of the writing process. Pam summarized the need for work on both aspects of writing in her statement that good writing is essential for further education "so they need to learn everything there is to learn about writing."

Students: Student reference to conventions appeared under the questions, "What does it mean to be a good writer," "How do these activities help you to become a better writer," and "What would you like to do less of during writing classes?" Overall, student survey responses revealed a dislike for convention work even though most students included proper application of conventions as something that good writers do.

Students responded that good writers "have good punctuation" (Sullivan), "had no spelling mistakes...also proper grammar" (Serge), and "no grammar mistakes...variety of punctuation"(Sam). When describing how school activities help them to improve their writing, Sullivan wrote, "Proofread. Edit."

Punctuation next appeared in response to what students wanted to do less. Sullivan repeated, "Edit. Proofread." Stan requested, "I would like less of reviewing punctuation, etc." Sam mentioned conventions directed at him personally when he wrote that he wanted less, "spelling mistakes."

In interviews, Sam, Seth and Steven were asked why they thought parents wanted work on conventions more than students did. All three intimated that students were, in Sam's words, "lazy" and that parents wanted children, "to be good at writing [for] the future." Steven surmised that there might be more to it than that, but when asked for more details he replied, "I don't know."

I then asked the students if they thought you could learn to be good at both conventions and ideas. All three replied in the affirmative saying, "Yeah, I believe students can do that" (Steven) with the clause, "If they worked at it" (Sam). I asked Seth how he felt about spelling, punctuation and grammar and he replied, "I think we have enough of it. We don't need any more of it or less of it."

I also asked them which was easier: developing ideas or mastering conventions. Again, all three boys responded alike that the conventions were easier. When I asked them to explain why, they provided astute answers. Steven described spelling as easier than ideas "because it is something that is taught to you. You don't have to—it's not like something you have. Its easier to learn." Seth echoed this with his explanation, "It's easier to think of words to spell and the punctuation you need but its harder to think of good ideas." Sam explained the trouble with ideas, "You run out of ideas, every once in awhile you have no ideas," and points out that with some convention work "all you have to do is circle words and look them up in a dictionary."

On the Assessment of Writing

Although it was not directly included in the survey or initially planned in interview questions, the assessment of writing emerged as a strong theme in the data. Comments on assessment appeared briefly in survey responses by students and teachers in reference to standardized assessments. Parent responses, especially the first parent follow-up interview with Penny, prompted me to include questions about assessment in subsequent interviews. The views expressed by participants on this topic were frequently accompanied by emotions of concern, frustration or confusion.

Teachers. The issue of assessment arose primarily during Talia and Taryn's interviews. I met with them after completing the transcription of Penny's interview and made a point of asking them about assessment. Both commented on a wide range of issues related to their experiences and practices of assessing writing.

One of the main themes from their responses was that the assessment of writing is a challenge. Taryn commented, "The language arts curriculum at the best of times is tough to decipher for us [as teachers]," and Talia stated that explaining assessment to parents "with writing, especially, that's so difficult." She later stated that assessment of reading is more straightforward "but writing is so much harder and more time-consuming." The challenges involved with marking writing included issues of what to assess, how to assess it, and how parents and students react to assessment of writing. Talia expanded on her earlier mention of using student drafts as an assessment tool, "I want to see where they're at, and I can often figure out their thought process—where they're having trouble, where their mistakes are if I can see two or three versions of their writing." She later pointed out the challenge in assessing student work completed at home as her ability to see the process through drafts is then limited. Talia felt that not everything needed to be assessed and went on to explain, "An assessment might be, 'this is a great idea, I want you to write more about it.'" Less emphasis on discreet assessment events such as spelling tests came out in Taryn's comments about her reluctance to teach spelling in isolation and through Talia's lack of emphasis on spelling test marks for grades. Talia stated that marking for ideas was much harder than marking for conventions:

> It's easier to mark [a piece of writing] and say, 'oh, well, that's good because you've got all of your words spelled correctly, versus the, 'I like the ideas that you have coming through in that first paragraph. I want you to expand on that.' And that's hard to mark and hard to judge right or wrong, I guess.

She also discussed the pitfalls of using comments versus marks as assessment methods, citing the notion that parents and students want a "7/10 or an 8/10" kind of mark. Talia's concern over how 'hard to mark' was explained in this comment:

> If I mark according to the provincial achievement test marking guidelines—and I mark every summer—they would not do well. So I tend to, if I'm marking things in between, I mark them very, I guess, easy, more to build up their confidence, being a writer.

Due to this approach in her marking, Talia expressed a feeling of caution over explaining her marks to parents, "I hesitate to tell parents how I'm marking because then either they get a false idea, 'oh, he's doing really well'...or, they get all angry because if I use the other kind of assessment, they don't do very well."

Teachers also shared their perspectives of parents' desires for more information about writing assessment. Tom referred to assessment from a parent's perspective when he pointed out that, as a parent himself, he wants to be able to see, "Is there progress being made?" Taryn echoed Tom's comment with her assertion that parents want to know "the performance" explaining "what level of skill they are showing related to the demands of the curriculum." Talia expressed another point of view:

> A lot of parents don't want to hear an explanation of it. They want to know—its more cut and dried—well, ten words were spelled wrong and his paragraphs weren't indented and he didn't have a conclusion so therefore, that equals a six out of ten. Whereas, writing—language arts—isn't that cut and dried, but they want it to be.

Another issue Talia raised is that the effort she puts into comment rich assessment may be wasted if students or parent do not value it: "I spend a lot of time writing all these things down and explaining everything and grade six [students] don't take their notes home at all, and they're on the floor at the end of the day."

Parents. Penny brought up the discussion of assessment during the first parent follow-up interview, which prompted me to ask Pam and Polly about assessment as well. The primary theme that came out of their interviews is that students, and their parents, need to understand what they are supposed to be doing in their writing so that they can use teacher feedback to help them improve. When I asked Penny if there was a minimum level of information about school writing instruction that she would feel comfortable with, she replied, "If you just know how a student's writing is being graded, you know, what's expected, then you can kind of look for those elements when you're helping them with their writing." She later expanded, "At least you'd know what the teacher's looking for." Pam explained her confusion with writing assessment this way:

> I think in writing…it's such a [subjective] way that when we look at a story, we may read it and go, 'This is awesome' and he got 6/10. We need to understand as parents why he got 6/10 so (a) we understand the marking scheme and (b) how can our child improve.

Pam later explained how understanding impacts student achievement when she said, "They're never going to improve their writing unless they understand what the person saw or how they accomplished it or not accomplished the assignment." Polly pointed out that her need to understand assessment depended on how well her son was doing:

> I think when things are going well, it doesn't seem so critical. I think if things weren't going so well I would have to know more of what their intentions were and how it was being marked, but when things are going well, I haven't felt like I needed that.

Penny explained a feeling of uncertainty about how her children were really doing in school writing:

> Well, you always kind of wonder...if you're stressing your child out about doing better when they're actually doing fine. So you hope that's all reflected in their report card because hopefully the teacher's telling you if they're not doing what they should be. Otherwise, you know, its kind of guesswork.

Students. Student references to assessment were limited in comparison to parent and teacher comments. As mentioned earlier, their memories of good experiences with writing in school were all tied into assessments, either doing well on the Provincial Achievement Test in writing, or by getting, "a full percentage mark" (Seth) on an assignment. Later on in the interviews, Steven was the only student with whom I discussed assessment directly. In reply to my question of whether he knew how his writing was being marked, he answered, "yeah, mostly. There's some times which I have no clue, but most of the time, yes." He later explained that teachers were looking for "descriptive words, not the easiest form of words, grammar, punctuation and spelling pretty much." When I asked him if his parents knew how his writing was being marked he replied, "Probably not."

On Communication of Instructional Methods

I included a section on the surveys that explored communication about instruction as one possible means for how participants build their understandings of school writing. These questions on the survey included: "How do you inform parents about the instruction of writing at school?"; "How do you find out about the instruction of writing in school?" and the related questions, "What happens when a student does not like how some part of writing is being taught?"; "What would you do if a parent approached you with a concern about your writing program?" and "What can a parent do if he/she has a concern about writing instruction at school?" In follow-up interviews, participants were asked appropriate variations of this question, "Many parents mentioned [on surveys] that they knew very few specifics about how writing is being taught in the classroom. What kinds of communication about instruction would you like to see/use more? For example, is student homework enough?" Teachers were also asked, "How important is it for parents and students to understand how writing is being taught and the reasons for methods chosen?" and "How far does teacher responsibility extend in this area?"

Teachers. Teachers provided a list of communication methods in response to the survey question on how parents are informed about instruction. These included paper documents like newsletters (Tom, Theo, & Trish) and course or assignment descriptions (Talia), program and student work displays (Theo & Trish), and direct interactions with parents like parent council meetings (Theo), parent information sessions (Trish) and both formal and informal parent-teacher interviews (Theo & Talia). Tom qualified his answer with the explanation, "I teach Math and Science—other than a newsletter regarding 6+1 writing I do not correspond with parents about this." Two teachers, Tony and Taryn, left this question blank. During the interviews, Taryn explained a struggle with this question:

> I guess because I'm in the high end of div[ision] two and div[ision] three, to me, I don't involve parents in understanding how writing is taught. And I know in the survey I struggled with those questions. I may have even skipped it because I don't really know what the right answer is to that.

Teachers had a variety of responses to the question of how they would respond to parent concerns about their writing programs. Tom wrote that he would "listen to see what specific concerns they had" and would "evaluate as to whether or not it would be productive to make changes." Theo and Trish focused on explaining the positive aspects of the writing program to "make sure they [parents] understand what the [school] focus is and what we are doing to achieve this" (Theo). Talia explained some specific concerns she's fielded from parents, which include wanting "more assignments for their children" to which she recommended they to keep a home journal. She also mentioned, "Some complaints have been that I mark too hard so I have high, medium and low samples for all assignments."

Tom, Taryn and Talia responded in varied ways to the interview question of how important it was for parents to understand teachers' writing pedagogy. Tom began his response from his own perspective as the parent, asking the question, "Even as a teacher in looking at my own daughter's work, do I really know how she's being taught to write?" He went on to ask and answer his own follow-up question, "How important is it to understand? I think more important than understanding how it's being taught is being able to see, is there progress being made." He later went on say that he believes teachers should explain the elements of writing that will be addressed in their program during the year, but reiterates that although "a few parents may want more than that, for myself, I would just want to know that the processes are being taught and, maybe, how is that going to be demonstrated when I look at my child's work." Talia repeated the theme, recognizing that parents "just really want to know how their child is doing."

Talia's response also addressed the issue with a focus on students' work. After stating, "That's probably an area I'm really lacking in," she later explained ideas she has had for improving her communication about methods with a reference in praise of Tom's abilities in that area:

> When I read one of your questions I thought what I should do this summer is write out a few explanations like writers workshop, why I do it, and the process we go through and put that into my parent letter at the beginning of the year. Because I'm not very good at that. Tom is much better at that. He's really good at that, I'm not so good.

Talia expanded on some communication ideas that she and Tom, who are teaching partners for the same grade six students, have considered, "We were talking about setting up an e-mail list next year hopefully and that might be a more effective way" to explain what was being taught that term and how assignments were going to be marked.

Part of the reason that Talia felt her communication about writing instruction was lacking was due to the flexible nature of her planning. In her words,

> I just often will go with whatever's happening. If we're reading a book or a chapter in our social textbook that sort of spurs a discussion, I might just stop

> everything and go with that and say, 'okay, well now we're going to do a writing assignment about [that].

She went on to express her recognition of the confusion this might cause and suggested what she should do to prevent that confusion:

> Often the students won't really see the point of it until its done. Then they see the big picture. And for me to stop and justify that to parents, I don't even think of doing that. And I probably should spend more time saying, 'okay, I did that because…'. So I should stop and I should explain it to the students, at least, and I don't.

Taryn's perspective on this question, as alluded to in her explanation of why she left these related questions blank on the survey, echoed Talia's recognition that she does not communicate a great deal about her instructional methods in writing.

After her assertion that, "No one's ever asked me, for any of my subjects, 'how do you teach the subjects?'." Taryn went on to explain the possible trouble she would have with answering it, "I would be hard pressed to have a parent come in and say, 'Well, have you covered these specific points of the curriculum'?" Like Talia, she points to the fluidity of her interpretation of the curriculum with her hypothetical response, "I could say yes because that's the great thing about L.A., you can say yes without knowing you've done them" referring to her earlier comment that, "the language arts curriculum at the best of times is tough to decipher for us [as teachers]."

Taryn's interview revealed a struggle with the issue of communicating with parents that was not as salient in Tom's or Talia's responses. She did state a few times, "It's an area of growth that I need to work on" and that "if someone gave me a good reason to do it" she might be motivated to provide parents with more explanations about her instructional methods in writing. However, she admitted, "The parents are the hard part of the stool to me." One of her primary concerns with informing parents about instruction was what the purpose would be, "I just don't really know what they would do with the information. I don't really know what relevance it would have for how they run things at home." Taryn knew that communication was an area for growth but wondered if it was worth it. Near the end of the interview she took a resigned stance to communicating about instruction, regardless of whether it served a purpose from her point of view, in order to keep parents happy, "The appearance of collectivity is valuable just in that it eases stress whether it makes anything else change doesn't really matter."

When teachers did make efforts to communicate with parents about instruction, there were a number of issues that arose as hindrances. While parent meetings were one method of communication mentioned on the surveys, teachers perceived that this approach reached a very limited field of parents. Talia described it this way:

> I've often toyed with the idea of, at the open house night, doing a little kind of power point in my classroom, using the projector just maybe explaining a little bit more about L. A. and reading, the writing process and social. We haven't done it yet. Tom and I have kind of played with the idea. Part of the problem is that we get the high achieving, very motivated students' parent in and they don't necessarily need that.

She later explains her reluctance to carry out this type of parent session, saying, "We haven't really moved forward with that either, partly because for the amount of work involved and the turn out, from a selfish point of view, it has to be worth it."

Parents. Parents provided a range of responses to the survey question, "How do you find out about the instruction of writing in school?" They mentioned work brought home by their child (Patricia, Peter, & Preston) or "just through what my child tells me" (Peggy). Several parents mentioned accessing information on the internet, citing, "Edmonton School's website" (Polly) and "learnalberta.ca" (Paul). Polly mentioned paper documents such as "a curriculum that outlined what would be taught in grade six." Pauline wrote, "I really have no idea," and Priscilla stated, "I don't. I'm at the point where I have written the year off and hope that grade seven will be different."

When asked what they could do if they had a concern about writing instruction at school, a majority of parents made reference to speaking directly with the teacher (Polly, Patricia, Pauline, Paul, Pam & Penny). Their comments included, "Speak with the teacher to find out what is going on in class" (Penny), "Teachers are easily accessible and very willing to discuss concerns about anything" (Patricia), and "We have always had good rapport with our son's teachers so we would have discussed issues during parent/teacher interviews" (Polly). Pauline added that she would "assume you would try and talk with the teacher, then the principal," but from there she was not sure. Preston mentioned that he would "at least make a note for teacher in his kid's agenda book."

Two parent responses did not involve the school. Peter wrote, "Follow up at home. The teacher has 20+ students to look after. I have only one to look after. I will have my son write at home." Priscilla, who hoped grade seven would be a better experience for her child, stated, "I have my son attend an after-school program to help him. I used to work with him but as he gets older it is better that [he] gets help from others."

In follow-up interviews asking what kinds of communication about instruction in writing that they would like to see more and how important it was to receive that communication, Penny, Polly and Pam shared a number of similar ideas. Similar to assessment, one theme that emerged was that understanding what was happening in writing instruction at school was important for helping them work with their child at home. Before describing her idea for daily "home writing" work similar to home reading programs already in place, Penny explained, "Maybe I should know more about [writing instruction] so that when you're helping them with homework at home you know what their teacher's also saying to them or expecting of them." Similarly, Pam wrote, "I think parents need to understand so that they can help their child learn to read and write," explained further by her statement:

> [J]ust a simple sentence or two to understand what they're working on, would be simple enough that when the work came home you could see what they had done and what they had accomplished. If this was what they were supposed to do and they didn't get it, you would know.

Polly recalled seeing a note about curriculum at the beginning of the year, but admitted, "Perhaps it [writing instruction] was covered in there. I can't remember." She also mentioned that her son's report card provided some information on what was expected and "what they planned to do." Polly's comments on using information about instruction to work with her son at home also brought out a second theme.

When their child was doing well in school, both Penny and Polly felt less of a need for information on instruction. Polly stated, "I'm not sure that I need to know the teacher's strategies," which piggy-backed on her earlier comment, "If I wanted to know information I would feel comfortable to go and ask for it." The main focus of her response on this topic was on the difference between her son's less positive experience in a different city the year before when she was "talking to his teachers quite a bit about strategies that I could follow through with at home, that sort of thing, but now that he's not struggling so much, I just figure it's going well." Then Polly added, "when he is doing well, I figure I'm not going to rock any boat." Penny echoed, "I'm just assuming all is well and good," but did go on to wonder if she should be finding out more in order to help her children at home.

Students. Students' survey questions varied on this point. They were asked one question, "What happens when a student does not like how some part of writing is being taught?" One student replied that he would "just tell the teacher" (Steven). Rather than seeing it as an issue for communication about instruction, most students interpreted this question personally, making an application to how it would negatively affect their learning with statements such as, "You don't do it very well, you don't understand it" (Sullivan), "He doesn't do good in that category of his/her writing" (Sam), and "It's happened to me and you lose focus and forget everything you've learned" (Spencer). Serge did not see any possible impact for student disagreement, saying, "It doesn't matter, it would stay the same." Several students made little reference beyond the fact that it had never happened to them (Stan, Stuart, & Skylar).

During follow-up interviews, I asked Sam, Seth and Steven how they thought parents should find out about writing lessons, whether just seeing students' homework was enough, and how important it was for parents and students to understand how writing is being taught. Sam and Steven began with teacher-driven communication methods such as writing a note, as in student agendas, or providing a "typed out sheet about what they've been doing the last month so parents have an idea about what their son's been learning" (Sam). Seth mentioned a parent-driven approach, "They should ask their kids or go to the teacher and ask how they're teaching and they should ask their kids if they like the way the teaching is." In response to whether homework was an adequate communication tool, both Steven and Seth disagreed with the explanations, "That's not all they do in school" (Steven), and "Sometimes if you just bring homework home, you don't really know what they're learning" (Seth). Sam interpreted this question as asking whether he felt he had enough writing homework to which he replied that, yes, he had enough but that it was much easier to write at school because "its easier to concentrate there," whereas at home there are distractions and "you can't just go home and play and then start writing all of a sudden."

All three interviewed students thought it was important for parents and students to understand why and how writing is being taught. Steven said that it was "very important" so that "parents know if their son or daughter are learning enough." When asked why he, as a student, thought it was important to know, he began an answer but did not finish it, "Because then…I don't know." Sam described his occasional frustration with not understanding what he was supposed to be doing or learning in a particular writing activity, "Sometimes I can't figure out what we're doing. Like if we're doing presentation or…usually the teacher tells us but sometimes I'm just like, what are we doing?" When I asked him if it helps if his teacher answers his question, Sam answered, "Yeah. And then you say, 'o-kay'."

On Teacher Expertise

One of the points raised in participants' discussions of communication about instruction was teacher expertise or status as a professional and what that entailed for the nature of communication that occurs between teachers and parents in particular.

Teachers. Tom, the teacher with the least subject area experience in Language Arts admitted in the survey, "My instruction in this area is weak." As a teacher with many years of experience, Tom concluded the interview with supportive comments about the growing expertise of his colleagues:

> I'm watching a couple of the young teachers that have only been in the game a year or two and they're coming up with really interesting ways to integrate things [writing strategies in other subject areas]. And so I learn from that.

The two language arts teachers expressed confidence in their current instructional strategies in writing with comments such as, "I know what I'm doing is effective" (Taryn) and Talia's assertion that some of her pedagogical choices are enjoyed by students in this excerpt from her survey: "Writers Workshop / Authors' Corner is the students' favorite and mine too (free writing)." Taryn likened being the expert on instructional methods to that of being a coach in a sport:

> It's just like coaching a sport, right? If I'm coaching [a] team, I don't spend a lot of time talking to parents about, 'these are the specific ways I'm teaching your kid how to [do move X]." I'm the expert.

She went on to defend the distinction between parent and teacher expertise:

> The bottom line is that [parents] are the experts with their child, but they're not experts in teaching. And so, I welcome any feedback parents can give me on

> what I can do to help their child be successful. But, at the same time, I always use a variety of methods. I always modify, change, stretch. And I do my best to meet every child's needs. I don't really feel like I would want to justify my methods to them, too.

Taryn also pointed out that teachers' accountability only extends so far since "I'm not the one that makes sure they have food in the morning or clothing or stress or no stress."

Parents. Parents also supported the notion that the teacher is the professional when it comes to issues of instruction. Although they expressed desires for more information, especially in the area of assessment, they made statements of deference to the status of teachers as the experts. Penny stated, "I think if the information's there, those that want to do something with it will. And those who just want to leave it in your capable hands will."

As mentioned earlier, Polly pointed out that her confidence in teacher expertise is primarily contingent upon how well her son is doing:

> You know, we've just moved to [this city]. We're quite happy with how things went this year. It seems like I was asking more questions before, in the years before, because I wasn't sure of what was happening....Well, I think when things are going well, it doesn't seem so critical. I think if things weren't going so well, I would have to know more of what their intentions were and how it was being marked.

And later on Polly continues with the comment, "I guess they're [teachers are] the professional."

Students. Student reference to expertise appeared once in the survey as related to student expertise in writing as opposed to teacher expertise. In answer to the question of what activities helped him to become a better writer, Spencer wrote, "nothing i'm already an excellent writer" [transcribed exactly as written].

Forming a Grounded Theory

This chapter illustrated how survey questions began the exploration of grade six teacher, parent and student understandings of school writing. Questions that were raised from the nature of survey responses were then used to delve deeper into participants' understandings through the follow-up interviews with nine participants. The categories that emerged from their comments revealed their strong impressions from personal experience with writing, intertwined with their perceptions of how writing is or ought to be taught today. Participants' definitions of good writing included areas of similarity and contention related to emphasis and pedagogy. After explaining my analysis from data to category, I concluded with the formulation of my grounded theory: Participants in this study describe the process of understanding school writing through themes of experience, uncertainty, definitions of good writing, hope in natural development, students as messengers, assessment, communication, pedagogy, value in writing well, and instructional emphasis.

In the following discussion chapter, I will explore the themes that tie these categories together in terms of areas of similarity and difference, and congruence and misperception, with implications these results have for the teaching of writing in school.

Chapter Five: Issues and Implications for Understanding School Writing

In their text, *Common Knowledge*, Edwards and Mercer (1987) explain their research into the sometimes dissimilar understandings that are constructed from classroom discourse. In their query into the possibility of constructing common knowledge between teachers and students, they describe the overt discourse that occurs in classrooms as the "tips of the icebergs, in which the great hidden mass beneath is essential to the nature of what is openly visible above the waterline" (p.160). In more recent educational theory, Olson (2003) challenges both educators and researchers to reconcile the subjectivity of individual knowledge with the normative standards and expectations that form the basis of the mandate of schools. He extends this notion of common knowledge into a definition of joint intentionality or the similarity of individual's intentional states:

> [I]n pedagogical contexts, intentional states can be shared, at least to some extent, by teacher and student. This is not simply the sharing of intentions as may occur in a conversational dialogue but rather an achieving of joint intentions by teacher and student in which the beliefs of the students are formulated and evaluated in terms of the norms and standards represented by the beliefs and intentions of the teacher. Revisions of beliefs in terms of theses norms and standards constitute conceptual change in the learner. The child meets the curriculum, not only as Dewey argued, by finding in the intuitions of the child the basis for the advanced knowledge represented by the curriculum, but rather through providing a forum for the formulation of joint or overlapping intentions in which private intentional

> states may be judged and assessed in terms of the standards and norms of the society. (p. 278)

In my research, I sought to gain insight into teacher, student and parent understandings of the enactment of the writing curriculum in school with the goal of being able to explore possibilities for building such joint intentions. The findings in the previous chapter have gone beyond the tips of the icebergs to reveal elements of participants' understandings about school writing that are not as readily apparent in the routine interactions of school life that typically occur between teachers, students and parents. Though the sample size was relatively small, and broad generalizations to other populations are not feasible, the responses of participants provided insight into some of the ways that school writing is understood.

In this chapter, I will place the findings into the context of interactions about writing between these groups. I will discuss the similarities of understanding that already show evidence of joint intentions. I will also consider the findings that reveal variances between participants' understandings and intentions related to school writing with the purpose of suggesting implications for teaching practice and further research.

Similarities in Understanding

Similarities in participants' understandings about writing and writing instruction reflect Olson's (2003) explanation of forming joint intentions as it "involves discovering a common frame of reference, a common goal, or a common ground with the learner" (p.243). For the purposes of this discussion, the common ground extends to parents and their important role in the construction of understandings about school writing along with students and teachers.

Experiences

Participants' experiences, both past and present, influenced their current understandings about school writing and the ways in which they interacted with others in regard to school writing. These similarities of experience reveal instances of commonality or closeness of participants' understandings in this group of grade six parents, students and teachers involved in an alternative program of choice within a public school.

Positive experience. Perhaps one of the most important similarities in participants' understandings about writing that impacts the rest of the discussion is that, in general, most participants reported at least one area of positive experience with writing in school. All three students and all three parents stated positive experiences with school writing in their interviews. While all three interviewed teachers mentioned areas of writing in which they struggled in school, they also all cited events or elements of growth that positively impacted their writing or feelings about writing. It is clear that the participants who agreed to be interviewed had a positive disposition toward the topic of writing and the instruction of writing based on their own experiences.

Educational experience. A similarity of demographic amongst the adult participants in this study was the high level of education reported on the survey. All three parents interviewed reported having a bachelor degree and two teachers, Tom and Talia, both hold masters degrees. The fact that all adults involved in this study reported at least some post-secondary education may have influenced their perceptions of what constitutes 'good' writing and the relatively high emphasis, especially on the part of parents, put on the instruction of, and student achievement in, writing in school.

Conventions experience. Demographic and educational similarities could also account for the similarity of understanding between parents and teachers that they both come from a background where grammar and spelling were salient aspects of writing instruction in school when they were children.

French-immersion experience. An unexpected similarity that appeared between two teachers and one student was their experience with French Immersion in elementary school. Taryn, Talia and Sam each described some of the challenges they faced in moving from French to English writing and writing instruction. Both teachers described difficulty with English spelling in school and both described a low emphasis on isolated instruction in spelling in their current practice.

Uncertainty

Although there were a few overlaps of understanding about elements of writing instruction, there were also similarities in the types of uncertainty participants had about those methods. In total, there were fourteen incidences where participants indicated partial to no knowledge about methods such as 6+1 Writing Traits and writing workshop when asked about them in either the surveys or interviews. Some participants may have some knowledge of methods that are used in Camden School, however, their knowledge was limited in their depth of understanding of those methods. Several of the other parents and students expressed no knowledge of the two programs at all. Parents' and students' uncertainty about instructional methods also reveals a variance with the knowledge of teachers.

Definitions of Good Writing

A number of similarities appeared between participants' understandings of what makes writing 'good'. Characteristics such as good vocabulary, description, creativity, readability, organization and appeal to the reader were understandings of good writing shared by all three groups of participants. Some of this understanding could be explained by participants' descriptions of the types of writing that they themselves liked to read. Similar education levels of parents and teachers could be another factor. Another explanation for shared definitions of good writing could be parent, student and teacher familiarity with terms particular to school writing such as vocabulary, organization and description. Parents and students shared similarities of understanding more frequently in the areas of the mechanics of writing than they did with teachers. Teachers and parents shared understandings related to the purposes of writing and the functionality of writing to convey the desired message. One aspect of similarities in good writing that caught my attention was that parents shared understandings with both students and teachers in these areas but that teachers and students demonstrated far fewer similarities in their valuations of good writing based on interview and survey responses.

Teachers' explanations of the reasons behind their methods, emphasizing improvement of content and overall writing proficiency over time, came through clearly in interviews. Students mentioned good ideas as one part of good writing, but spent more time keying in on discrete details like spelling and vocabulary. Even with shared naming of characteristics in general, these students' meta-cognitive understandings of the purposes of writing instruction may not extend beyond these elements. I was struck by the way that students in this study saw individual writing projects that they practice at school without necessarily seeing the connections between them or understanding the long-term purposes for the activities related to teachers' instructional motivation.

Hope in Natural Development

I was intrigued by the similarities of teachers' and parents' feelings of hope in the natural ability of children to grow in their writing skills. Their hope in the ability of children to respond to school instruction with improvements in their writing skills did not surprise me. However, given participants' affirmations of teachers as experts in the instruction and assessment of writing, I was surprised that some of the teachers' comments reflected a hope that students would acquire writing skills without specific instruction in those areas. While teachers could explain the strategies and methods they used to teach students how to write well and expressed confidence in the writing instruction involved in their subject areas, there still seemed to be a hopefulness that if their methods somehow did not work, that students would still pick up the necessary skills needed.

Students as Messengers

One similarity related to communication between home and school included the understanding of a majority of participants that a key means of interaction about school instruction in writing occurred via students. The primary ways that parents gained information about school writing was through what their children told them and through writing samples or projects students chose to share or bring home from school. I also heard from all three groups that this transfer of information through students via school assignments or homework was not always a sufficient source of information. Several participants, including teachers, believed teachers should provide some extra means of information about instruction.

Variances and Missed Perceptions

Further to their research into building common knowledge, Edwards and Mercer (1987) concluded, "Participants' conceptions of each other's mental contexts may be wrong or, more likely, only partially right" (p.161). The previous section demonstrates areas of similarity between participants' understandings about writing and the teaching and learning of writing in the grade six context at Camden School. The findings also demonstrate areas of variance, where participants' understandings did not intersect, and areas of missed perceptions, where one participant or group of participants perceived a similarity of understanding that other participants or groups of participants did not.

Assessment

A clear variance that arose in the data between parents and teachers was in the area of writing assessment. Teachers in this study felt reluctant to provide numerical marks or percentages on writing assignments while perceiving this to be what parents and students desired. Talia in particular described concern about parents interpreting marks too positively or too negatively and noted that this made her feel reluctant to explain her assessment to parents. A missed perception within this sample was the belief expressed by Taryn and Talia that parents disregard comments in lieu of marks. Their views contrast with Pam's, Polly's and Penny's expressed desires for just such an explanation to accompany marks so that they can understand where their children are at and where they need to improve. These variances may be due to the small sample size; a larger sample might allow for more instances of similarity in beliefs about assessment. However, I saw this as an important example of the possibility of inaccuracy in perceptions about other's desires or beliefs. This missed perception also illuminates the possibility that the teachers in this study may not always understand how parents, or students, view and use assessment, and likewise, students and parents may not understand the teachers' marking practices.

A related variance involved the opinions of teachers that the effort involved in assessing via marks and providing additional comments was not always worth the time and energy involved. They expressed the feeling that students and parents were likely to spend little, if any, time considering the marks and explanations made. Yet, although parents felt explanations of assessment would allow them to support their child's progress at home, they did not want teachers to find the provision of explanations an onerous task. This variance causes me to consider the issue of how teachers can best manage an assessment protocol that is reasonably efficient but also consistent and clear enough to be easily understood by parents and students.

Another distinction among participants' responses involved standardized assessments such as the writing exam on Provincial Achievement Tests and district Highest Level of Achievement Tests. A few teachers mentioned that these are the least important aspects of writing instruction. Yet, when students mentioned assessment on surveys and interviews, it was usually tied to PATs, HLATs or other marking events. There is a gap between what teachers value in writing instruction and how the value of writing activities are perceived by students. Marks were far less important to teachers in the study, but apparently very important to students and parents. I wonder why this disparity exists and if teachers may be communicating values about writing that they do not realize, for example, inadvertently conveying an emphasis on marks that they do not intend. I also question how students perceive success in school, whether it is tied solely to marks, or whether an intrinsic sense of success in a process or product is possible.

Communication

On the surface, many elements of communication fit into a shared body of knowledge. Participants from each group mentioned formats for communication such as newsletters, notes in agendas, parent teacher interviews, parent council meetings and progress reports. However some of the similarities themselves reveal agreement about areas of variance on communication.

Communication and the appearance of collectivity. The survey responses, in particular, revealed a fairly low level of parent knowledge about the methods of instruction of writing used at school. Several parents expressed frustrations over lack of communication in this area. Teachers perceived that parents indeed want more information than they felt they were able or willing to provide. Parents, especially those interviewed, described this variance as well by questioning themselves whether they actually read the documents sent home and wondering whether they should actually ask more questions.

Several parents and teachers also shared the idea that even an appearance of collectivity in communication may break down in reality. For example, a few parents confessed minimal use of the curriculum outlines and other teacher generated explanations of curriculum and instruction. Several parents expressed a recognition that information is out there if they want it, and that, for the most part, they are not too concerned about how writing is being taught as long as their children are doing well enough. Parents and teachers in this study seem to share a mutual resignation to the fact that there may be information about instruction in writing that is provided by schools and teachers that is either not accessed by parents or is not seen as a priority or relevant to them in practice. One possible explanation is that most of the types of communication mentioned in this study were one-way, teacher-provided documents. The only two-way communication tool listed in the study by a few participants from each group were students' agendas, which they use to track their assignments and activities and can be used for notes between parents and teachers. Perhaps a greater variety or more proficient use of two-way communication tools like this may allow more real collectivity.

Communication and usefulness. A related issue of missed perceptions of communication involves the purposes and benefits of communication. A few teachers questioned whether their communicative efforts were worth it based upon the fact that newsletters, marked assignments and other take-home materials do not always make it home or are not read. Limited parent attendance at teacher-hosted information nights was another detractor. A few teachers wondered how parents use information that is provided. Taryn questioned whether division two teachers should even need to communicate with parents about writing instruction. Parents, on the other hand, said that they needed information about instruction so that they would know how to help their children at home. I see this disparity between parent and teacher perceptions as pertaining more to the type and content of communication rather that its availability or proliferation. Whether or not this small sample size is indicative of the perceptions of the greater population of parents, it makes me question how parents can better communicate the kinds of information they desire. I also see this as a re-iteration of the need for teachers at all divisions to become aware of the needs of parents, and to be willing to alter their communication practices to meet some of these needs.

Pedagogy

Another area of variance that includes issues of communication among teachers, students and parents relates to their understandings of writing pedagogy used in the classroom. Participants showed varied understandings of pedagogy in the areas of 6+1 Writing Traits, writing projects, the value of school writing, and areas of emphasis within school writing instruction.

Pedagogy of 6+1 Writing Traits. At the time of this study, teachers in Camden School had completed a year of focused training on the 6+1 Writing Traits instructional model with the incumbent expectation that these traits were to become a common language and basis for writing assessment school-wide, and in language arts classrooms in particular. In addition there were numerous displays on the traits in school hallways and classrooms. However, in both interviews and survey responses, parents and students demonstrated little to no knowledge of the 6+1 Writing Traits program; those who did demonstrate some knowledge of the program were unable to provide descriptions of the actual traits (ideas, organization, word choice, voice, sentence fluency, conventions and presentation) beyond a minimal and sometimes inaccurate way. One explanation for this lack of shared understanding is that 6+1 was a relatively new initiative in the school and the permeation of the program into classroom practice was a gradual progression over the course of the year. However, given the intensity of teacher focus on the 6+1 Traits model during weekly and monthly professional development sessions, I am concerned by this variance between teacher understandings and those of parents and students. A number of questions come to mind including issues of how thoroughly this program was being implemented, how well students understood what was going on during classroom instruction, and how implementation of the program was communicated to parents.

Pedagogy of writing projects. A related variance also appeared between the types of writing processes and products reported by teachers as components of their writing program, and the types of writing activities observed in the responses of students and parents. Stories and news articles were predominant in student and parent descriptions of the types of writing done in the grade six writing program at Camden School. I conclude that this reflects the activities favored by students and, therefore, the samples most likely to be shared with parents. However, the short list of writing activities noted by students and parents stands in contrast with the lengthy lists created by teacher participants in the study and rarely intersected with teachers' descriptions of process approach writing workshop and Traits work. This contrast in the valuations of specific aspects of writing or writing activities may selectively influence the nature of observations that students and parents make about the types of writing activities that occur at school. This difference in recalled writing activities shows me that a teacher's programming intentions in writing instruction, however well-planned, may not be as clear to students or their parents.

Value of Writing Well

Both students and parents placed a strong emphasis on the need for one to be a good writer in order to be successful in life. Common themes between these two groups were notions of writing as necessary to academic success and, by extension, to successful employment. While most teachers shared an obvious sense of the importance of reading and writing, there were some distinct variances in their purposes for school writing from those expressed by parents and students. While the three teachers interviewed expressed the desire to see their students achieve success in writing, their own experiences with writing in school may have shaped the value they place on specific aspects of writing.

Both Taryn and Talia described challenges in their experiences as writers in school, each having found that certain elements of writing, especially spelling, were difficult. Tom posited that his decision to pursue a career in mathematics and science education may have been due, in part, to his perceived lack of success at typical fiction writing in language arts. However, despite their partial struggles with school writing, all three teachers achieved academic and career success in the field of education, and two teach within the language arts subject area.

Taryn, in particular, demonstrated divergence from parent and student ideas in this study by questioning the relevance of school writing achievement, or even academic achievement in general, with financial success in our current job market. While recognizing some aspects of writing related to non-school environments such as resumes and shopping lists, Taryn held the view that students likely only think of writing as something you do in school or something you do as a paid author. It is unclear to me whether Taryn shares this somewhat narrow definition of writing, or if she is suggesting that this is the view of the students and parents she encounters. Other than references to short answer and other subject area projects in writing, only a few participants made references to other aspects of writing such as writing for personal expression through journaling and writing for communication through e-mail and the internet.

Instructional Emphasis

A possible lack of shared beliefs on the importance of writing for future success ties in with a second area of variance. Different groups placed more emphasis on different aspects of writing instruction. Parents put the most emphasis on student proficiency in spelling and grammar and teachers placed the most emphasis on building up student proficiency with content. An interesting secondary variance was that the teachers in this study shared a sense that 'other' teachers placed more emphasis on conventions than they did. This lack of similarity among parents and teachers on the purpose of school writing instruction and elements that are emphasized may account for some of the tensions over communication and assessment that arise between teachers and parents. It also introduces the possibility that students may sometimes feel the tension of conflicting priorities related to writing between home and school. This tension between emphasis on content and conventions was apparent in specific reference to teaching conventions and in reference to technologies used to assist writing.

Writing and conventions. The topic of conventions was one of the most contentious in this study. On the surface, there were similarities of belief that quality writing includes accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation. However, participants varied in the relative emphasis placed on specific instruction in conventions versus content.

Teachers, themselves, had varying views of conventions. Several teachers, including Talia and Taryn, believe that teaching conventions in isolation was not as useful as work in context and that perfect conventions were not necessary to good school writing. However, both Talia and Taryn also mentioned using spelling units, or specified, isolated work in spelling, because such work required the least preparation time and yielded easy to measure results. A clear message of internal conflict for teachers in this study was that conventions were less important but easiest to assess, and that content or ideas were more important but most difficult to assess.

Parents, as indicated earlier in contrast to the general teacher response, expressed a desire for more work on grammar and conventions and supported the idea that spelling units were beneficial to growth in writing. The parent concern that teachers do not worry about spelling is, in part, a similarity with the valuations expressed by teachers. However, several teacher comments included assertions that they probably do much more work on conventions than parents realize, due to the fact that spelling work does not always occur in isolated spelling units or spelling tests. Based on their experiences of spelling work in school, I think that it may be difficult for parents not currently involved in education or versed in recent pedagogical methods to identify or recognize methods of work on conventions that are conducted in more integrated ways. This confusion over convention work illustrates another communication issue that teachers may need to address more directly. Assuming that parents recognize the component parts of instruction, like spelling as a part of writing, ignores the possibility that shifts in pedagogy over a generation may make integrated or innovative practices less distinguishable.

A striking example of missed perceptions between parents, students, and in some part teachers, was assumptions about students' attitudes toward conventions. Parents believe that students do not like working on conventions and teachers expressed concerns that students often struggle with work on conventions. However, several survey responses and all three student interviews revealed a general opinion that students find elements of conventions, like spelling and punctuation, much easier to master than the construction of ideas. Taryn specifically talked about how students gravitate toward editing conventions during peer review work, even when she instructed them to focus on ideas. This variance could be due to the fact that conventions are more noticeable, therefore errors in conventions are more obvious to teachers and parents than difficulties with ideas. Students' perceptions of convention work in this study provided me with new insight into how students experience the process of learning to write: that the mechanics, once you have them down, can become rote skills, but that the putting together of your own ideas into readable texts is a constantly unique and often more challenging endeavor.

Writing and technology. The integration of technology and writing appeared in this study as another area of variance on conventions among parents and teachers. Though technology was not an intentional focus of this study, the findings revealed possible tensions between teachers and among teachers and parents related to valuations and uses of technology in the instruction of writing. There were a few references to the use of technological tools in writing in this study that mentioned the use of computers in the final draft or presentation phase. A few instances of parent and teacher similarities included the belief that computers are less important aspects of writing instruction and that functions like text-messaging may be detrimental to the development of good writing skills.

A key issue of variance, however, was the use of spell-check. Both language arts teachers, who each related personal struggles with spelling, emphasized the use of spell-check as a valuable revision tool for themselves and for students. They felt that spell-check allowed them to concentrate on the content of their writing without anxiety over conventions. In contrast, several parents were decidedly negative about the use of, or possible reliance on, spell-check. I question how well we as educators are dealing with these possible tensions or if we are even aware of them. As the integration of technology continues to increase in schools, I predict that more attention will need to be given to the implications of technology use in writing and the understandings that teachers, parents and students have of the purposes and usefulness of new technological integration.

Implications for Developing Understandings of Writing in School

In considering the implications of this study, I have focused on the perspectives of educators and the possible ways in which issues of understanding about writing can be addressed by writing teachers within the school. These implications include reconsidering how information is communicated to parents and students, expecting areas of variance, considering others' experiences with writing and taking steps to make our instructional practices explicit.

Reconsider Methods of Communication

The implications for improving communication about writing instruction include improving the types and methods of communication that occur between home and school. Educators should reconsider how we communicate and monitor understandings of writing instruction among parents and students.

With parents. It is clear from the types of similarities and variances that occurred between parent and teacher understandings of writing that while there is some effective transmission of information about the instruction of writing in school, this is primarily either one-way, teacher directed communication or communication via writing products brought home by students. Providing opportunities to elicit from parents the types of information that they would find pertinent might allow teachers to refine the communication process. By tailoring communication from school to what parents express as areas of need, teachers may be more likely to provide information that will be more effectively accessed by parents. A greater focus on proactive communication could limit the time and effort spent on types of one-way communication from school that parents view as less useful. Opening the door to responsive or two-way communication has been shown to be a positive factor in improving achievement of students in a variety of intervention studies (Cox, 2005) and could be an important tool in creating shared understanding about the instruction of writing in school.

With students. Cazden (2001) raises essential questions regarding the similarities and variances of understanding between teachers and students in the classroom when she states:

> Classroom discourse happens among students and teacher. But arguably the most important goal of education is the change *within* each student that we call learning. How do the words spoken in classrooms affect this learning? How does the observable classroom discourse affect the unobservable thinking of each of the students, and thereby the nature of what they learn? (p.60)

Teachers put great effort into trying to find out, assess and build upon what students know. It is also sometimes easy to assume that the information we share with students during instruction results in shared understandings. However, the results of this study demonstrate that there are key areas in the teaching and learning of writing where the gaps between teacher and student understanding could be problematic. The lack of shared understanding about purposes and emphasis in school writing between teachers and students reinforced for me that teachers need to continually gain access to students' conceptualizations of the purposes for school writing activities and, in response, to communicate reasons for specific activities and their relationship to goals of the writing program.

Expect Variances and Watch for Missed Perceptions

If teachers take a stance of expecting variances between teacher and student and parent understandings about the processes of writing and the instruction of writing in school, they may more readily recognize breakdowns in communication. By taking proactive communicative measures in areas of possible variance such as contentions over conventions and lack of understanding of the ways in which different elements of writing are incorporated into the instruction, teachers might create avenues for similarity and joint intentions with students or parents. Proactive measures could include the types of two-way communications focused on specific areas like parent or student views of conventions and content and teacher explanations in kind of how these areas are met in classroom instruction.

Findings from this study are also a reminder to teachers that students may appear to share understandings about writing within the atmosphere of the classroom, but that a depth of understanding of concepts may not follow. Student understandings of instructional practices could be evaluated in order to ascertain the types of missed perceptions about elements of writing that could create anxiety, such as confusion over terms or different valuations of writing projects or processes. More importantly, if teachers improve communication in areas that may directly impact achievement, such as confusion over the purposes or meaning of assessments, it could facilitate greater student and parent buy-in to those methods and increase the likelihood of the application of that information in future writing work.

Consider Experiences that May Impact Understandings

Like Edwards' and Mercer's (1987) "tip of the iceberg" analogy, the impact of participants' personal experiences in school on their beliefs and, in turn, what they observed to be salient aspects of writing and the instruction of writing demonstrated the reality that what may be obvious to a teacher or parent or student may not be so to the other. This has special implication for teachers in light of the ways that their own experiences in school may impact and influence their instructional methods, as indicated by the teachers' views of spelling in this study. While this influence may be positive, it is possible that it may cause a limited consideration of others' experiences and contingent valuations. It is also possible that strong reactions to personal experiences in writing my cause teachers to disregard practices that may be of benefit to some of the students in their classrooms.

If teachers recognize experiences with writing, both past and present, that underlie parent and student understandings, they may better predict what parents or students interpret from classroom practice. A greater recognition of others' perspectives may also facilitate communication about instruction or assessment of writing when conflict arises. One example would be the variance of beliefs about spelling which led some parents to conclude that it was not being taught, when in reality it was being taught, but in ways unrecognizable to parent experience.

Make Explicit the Implicit

The previous implications lead into a recommendation for teachers, parents and students themselves, to be wary of the assumption that understandings about writing, concerns about writing and interactions related to writing are implicitly understood. The evidence from this study shows that understandings about writing do not universally intersect even within the homogenous sample. I predict that within a more diverse population an even greater need for explicit communication of processes of instruction, priorities and areas of confusion would exist. Where common ground of experience with school writing may have existed with more frequency a generation ago, changes in pedagogy and cultural diversity may requires teachers to spend even more time explicitly building a shared understanding of instructional practice in the future.

Continue to Pursue Joint Intentions

Olson (2003) urges educators to work toward "connecting the subjective with the normative" (p.219), building similarities between the understandings of students, teachers, (and parents) with the normative demands of curriculum and related mandates of the public education system. He describes these similarities as the joint intentions of participants toward a given end, in this case, the collaboration of teachers, students and their parents to develop the writing skills of students to a level of proficiency needed to meet the expectations of curriculum and the functions of writing necessary for continued growth in educational achievement.

Suggestions for Further Research

The sample from this study included a relatively narrow population and size. Research that compares views of writing and instruction in writing from more diverse perspectives could provide insights into the teaching and learning of writing that did not appear in this study.

This research was conducted in one site by a teacher-researcher. Similar studies that involve a comparison of more than one site and external researchers might elucidate different results due to participant comfort and candor with an impartial third party on the issue of understandings of school pedagogy.

The format for my study of parent, teacher and student understandings of writing included a one-time survey response and a one-time interview. A longitudinal study of the similarities and variances of student, parent or teacher understandings about writing over time could provide constructive feedback to educators and curriculum developers in terms of how these understandings are constructed and how curriculum could be designed to allow for establishing joint intentions between teachers and students.

Most participants in this study had favorable memories of their past or current school writing experiences. A comparison study of parents, students and teachers with strongly negative experiences with school writing might reveal findings that challenge, support or extend those of this study.

Other questions for consideration in further research that arise from this study include aspects of parent knowledge, student achievement, communication and technology. Such questions include: Is there a correlation between student achievement and parent knowledge of instructional practices? Is there a correlation between parent support of instructional methods and student achievement? What methods of establishing two-way communication are effective in building joint intentions on school writing development? What role does technology currently take in the development of writing skills at school? What impact do technologies such as spell-check and grammar-check have on overall development of student abilities in writing?

Summary

This study provides an important glimpse into some of the issues that exist in the ways that teachers, students and parents understand school writing. The implications raised related to similarities and variances of understanding about how writing is taught urge educators toward improved, two-way communication about instructional practices in writing with both parents and students. This study may have just scratched the surface of the types of understandings that are shared or not shared on school writing. I hope that consideration of these findings will be used within the context of the research site itself to facilitate growth in the formation of joint intentions between teachers, parents and students. It is also my hope that educators or administrators in other contexts may find a similar model of investigation to be a useful first step in creating joint intentions among parents, teachers and students toward improved student achievement.

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Appendix A

Volunteer's Script for Introduction of Research Project to Grade 6 Classes

Hello, my name is ______________________________. Mrs. Durance has asked me to tell you about a research project she is doing to finish her Master's of Education degree from the University of Alberta. Mrs. Durance wants to find out what students, parents and teachers think about writing and how writing is taught in school. She is inviting all of you grade six students, your parents and your grade six teachers to participate in this project. The project has two parts. First of all, you would fill out a survey that asks for your ideas about writing and how it is taught. After the surveys have been collected, Mrs. Durance will ask three or four students, parents and teachers for interviews in person.

Mrs. Durance wants me to make sure you know that you don't have to take part in this survey. Doing the project or not won't have any negative consequences. If you do choose to complete the survey, you will help Mrs. Durance write her thesis, which she will share with others who are interested in teaching writing. She also wants you to know that all of your answers will be kept confidential and when she writes her thesis, she will make sure that all responses stay anonymous. No one will ever know who said what.

I will be handing out two surveys to you. [hold up examples]. The one with the yellow "Student Survey" label is for you The one with the green "Parent Survey" label is for your parents. Stapled to each envelope are information letters and consent forms as well as the surveys. In the student package are two consent forms—one for you to sign and one for your parents to sign giving their permission for you to participate since you are under 18 years old. Your parents consent form for doing their own surveys is separate. If you read the information and decide to do the survey (with permission and signed consent forms), then you can return the surveys back to the response box in the office or you can put them in the mail. You can ask Mrs. Durance for a stamp if you need one. Make sure the consent form is signed and comes back with the survey and that the envelope is sealed shut. You can bring back your survey as soon as it is finished but Mrs. Durance hopes to have them all back in two weeks (by Tuesday, May 29th).

If you have any questions you can talk to Mrs. Durance or to one of the other people listed in the information letter [hold up letter].

Thank you for letting me invite you to do Mrs. Durance's project on writing.

[hand out packages in order of number (e.g. 1, 2, 3)—students do not have to take one if they don't want to. Please keep track of how many are handed out in each class].

Room _____ : gave out _______ surveys
Room _____ : gave out _______ surveys
Room _____ : gave out _______ surveys

Thank you!

Appendix B

Survey Questionnaires

PARENT SURVEY on WRITING and HOW WRITING IS TAUGHT IN SCHOOL

In this research survey on writing, I am seeking to understand parents' views of writing and how it is taught. Your responses will be used to help me learn more about the similarities and differences in views of writing of teachers, students and parents. Please respond to as many questions as you feel comfortable answering. You may skip any questions that you wish. When you have finished, please place this survey along with the signed consent form in the envelope provided and send back to school anytime before May 29, 2007.

PART ONE—Questions on Writing

1. What does it mean to be a good writer?

2. How do you think writing is taught at school?

3. How do you find out about the instruction of writing at school?

4. What do you appreciate about the way writing is taught at school?

5. What would you like to see emphasized more in school writing instruction?

6. What would you like to see emphasized less in school writing instruction?

7. What can a parent do if he/she has a concern about writing instruction at school? (Has this ever happened to you?)

PART TWO—Demographic Questions

1. I am : ☐ male ☐ female

2 My grade six child is enrolled in this program at Camden School: (check one)
- ☐ regular program
- ☐ sports alternative program

3. This is my child's _____ year at Camden School: (check one)

☐ first	☐ fourth	☐ seventh
☐ second	☐ fifth	
☐ third	☐ sixth	

4. My child gets to school by: (check the one that applies the most often)
- ☐ walking or riding a bike from nearby
- ☐ car from a community near the school (10 minutes or less)
- ☐ car from a community in a different part of the city (more than 10 minutes)
- ☐ riding the yellow school bus
- ☐ riding a city transit (ETS) bus

5. If I want to get in to school to meet with a teacher, doing so is: (check one)
- ☐ usually easy
- ☐ sometimes easy / sometimes hard
- ☐ usually hard (Why? ________________________________)

6. The language we speak most often at home is: (check one)
- ☐ English
- ☐ Other: (please specify) ________________________________

7. The highest level of education I have completed is: (check one)
- ☐ elementary school (grade six)
- ☐ junior high school (grade nine)
- ☐ some high school
- ☐ high school diploma
- ☐ some college or university
- ☐ university degree (Bachelor's level)
- ☐ graduate degree (Master's or Doctoral level)

Please indicate on the consent form whether or not you are willing to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher as a follow-up to information provided in this survey.

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THIS PROJECT WITH YOUR TIME AND INPUT!

TEACHER SURVEY on WRITING and HOW WRITING IS TAUGHT IN SCHOOL

In this research survey on writing, I am seeking to understand teachers' views of writing and how they teach it. Your responses will be used to help me learn more about the similarities and differences in views of writing of teachers, students and parents. Please respond to as many questions as you feel comfortable answering. You may skip any questions that you wish. When you have finished, please place this survey along with the signed consent form in the envelope provided and mail it or return to Mrs. (volunteer) or Kathleen Durance, anytime before May 29, 2007.

PART ONE—Questions on Writing

1. What does it mean to be a good writer?

2. What kind of writing program do you use at school?

3. How do you inform parents about the instruction of writing at school?

4. What are the strengths of your writing program? What would you like to improve?

5. What do you see as the most and least important parts of a school writing program?

6. What would you do if a parent approached you with a concern about your writing program? (If you have had a personal experience like this, please explain.)

PART TWO—Demographic Questions

1. I am : ☐ male ☐ female

2. My morning (am) teaching assignment is primarily with these students: (check one)
   - ☐ regular program students
   - ☐ sports alternative program students
   - ☐ mixed groupings of sports alternative and regular program students

3. My afternoon (pm) teaching assignment is primarily with these students:(check one)
   - ☐ regular program students (options)
   - ☐ sports alternative program students (coaching or teaching)
   - ☐ mixed groupings of sports alternative and regular program students

4. Of the total number of parents/guardians of my homeroom students in a given term, I typically meet at least once with a percentage of parents in this range: (check one)
   ☐ 0 - 25% ☐ 26 - 50%
   ☐ 51 – 75% ☐ 75 – 100%

5. I have been teaching under a long-term contract (not including subbing) for: (check one)
   ☐ 1-3 years ☐ 4-6 years ☐ 7-10 years ☐ 11 or more years

6. I have been teaching at Camden School for: (check one)
   ☐ 1-3 years ☐ 4-6 years ☐ 7-10 years ☐ 11 or more years

7. My highest level of post-secondary education is: (check one)
   - ☐ Bachelor's degree
   - ☐ Graduate studies toward completion of a Master's degree
   - ☐ Master's degree
   - ☐ Post-graduate studies beyond first Master's degree

8. The courses I have taught this year are: (check all that apply)
   - ☐ Language Arts
   - ☐ Math
   - ☐ Science
   - ☐ Social Studies
   - ☐ Second Language (please specify)________________________________
   - ☐ Other Options (please specify) __________________________________

Please indicate on the consent form whether or not you are willing to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher as a follow-up to information provided in this survey.

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THIS PROJECT WITH YOUR TIME AND INPUT!

STUDENT SURVEY on WRITING and HOW WRITING IS TAUGHT IN SCHOOL

In this research survey on writing, I am seeking to understand students' views of writing and how it is taught in school. Your responses will be used to help me learn more about the similarities and differences in views of writing of teachers, students and parents. Please respond to as many questions as you feel comfortable answering. You may skip any questions that you wish. When you have finished, please place this survey along with the signed consent form in the envelope provided and mail or bring back to school anytime before May 29, 2007.

PART TWO—Written Response Questions

1. What does it mean to be a good writer?

2. What activities do you do in school to help you learn how to write well?

3. How do these activities help you to become a better writer?

4. What do you like about the way writing is taught at school?

5. What would you like to do less of during writing classes?

6. What would you like to do more of during writing classes?

7. What happens when a student does not like how some part of writing is being taught? (Has this happened to you?)

PART TWO—Demographic Questions

1. I am : ☐ male ☐ female

2. I am enrolled in this program at Camden School: (check one)
   ☐ regular program
   ☐ sports alternative program

3. This is my _____ year at Camden School: (check one)
   ☐ 1st ☐ 3rd ☐ 5th ☐ 7th
   ☐ 2nd ☐ 4th ☐ 6th

4. I usually get to school by: (check the one that applies the most often)
   ☐ walking or riding a bike from nearby
   ☐ car from a community near the school (10 minutes or less)
   ☐ car from a community in a different part of the city (more than 10 minutes)
   ☐ riding the yellow school bus
   ☐ riding a city transit (ETS) bus

5. If my parents want to get in to school to meet with a teacher, doing so is: (check one)
   ☐ usually easy
   ☐ sometimes easy / sometimes hard
   ☐ usually hard (Why? ____)
   ☐ I don't know

6. The language we usually speak at home is: (check one)
   ☐ English
   ☐ Other: (please write the name of the language)______________________

Please check the box on the consent form if you are willing to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher as a follow-up to information provided in this survey.

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THIS PROJECT WITH YOUR TIME AND INPUT!

Appendix C

Recall Notice

Dear Grade Six Students and Parents:

Thank you for your ongoing support of the writing research project. The surveys provide insight into how students, parents and teachers understand how writing is taught and learned. The enthusiasm of the grade six teachers to promote this project is clear. Unfortunately, it appears that promotion of the project has caused some miscommunication regarding the voluntary nature of the study. Ethical guidelines clearly state that involvement in the survey and interviews must be willing and voluntary and that there can be no negative results for non-participation. If you have felt undue stress to participate, and are uncomfortable with your participation, I invite you to request that your survey be sent back to you and removed from the study. In good conscience, I can only use data that is collected from informed, willing participants.

If you wish to withdraw from the study, please indicate your name on the line below and return to Mrs. Kathleen Durance at Donnan School:

☐ Please remove my survey from the writing research project and return it to me.

Name: ____________________________ Signature: ____________________________
(please print)

Date: ____________________________

Appendix D

Follow-Up Interview Questions

Possible Follow-up Interview Questions (Parents)

1. The parents, teachers and students who responded to the surveys expressed many of the same definitions of what a good writer can do. Where do you think we get our understanding of what good writing is? (How can you tell the difference between good writing and poor writing?)

2. Many teachers mentioned that they use "6+1 Writing Traits" and Writing Workshop. How much do you know about these teaching strategies?

3. In general, parents expressed a desire for more work to be done on teaching spelling, punctuation and grammar while some students expressed a desire for less emphasis on these parts of writing. Why do you think parent and student opinions may differ in this area? (All groups stated that good use of conventions was one sign of a good writer.)

4. Several teachers felt that one of the most important parts of teaching writing was helping students understand the steps in the writing process and giving them lots of opportunity to practice. Most parents wanted to see an increase in the work done on teaching conventions (spelling, grammar, punctuation). Are these two goals mutually exclusive or can they exist together?

5. Many parents mentioned that they knew very few specifics about how writing is being taught in the classroom. What kinds of communication about instruction would you like to see/use more? (For example, is student homework enough?)

6. How important is it for parents and students to understand how writing is being taught and the reasons for the methods chosen? (Do they need to understand or is it best left up to the teacher?)

7. The vast majority of parents who responded to the survey have children in sports alternative programs. Was there something about this research project, or how it was presented, that made it appeal more to sports alternative parents or do you think it was just the "luck of the draw"?

Possible Follow-up Interview Questions (Students)

1. The parents, teachers and students who responded to the surveys described what a good writer can do in similar ways. How do people know what good writing is? (How can you tell the difference between good writing and poor writing?)

2. Many teachers mentioned that they use "6+1 Writing Traits" and Writing Workshop. Do you know what these are? (Can you describe them? What do you like/dislike about them?)

3. In general, parents said that more school time should be spent on teaching spelling, punctuation and grammar but some students said they wanted to do less of these. Why do you think parent and student opinions may differ in this area? (All groups stated that good use of conventions was one sign of a good writer.)

4. Do you think that students can learn to be good at both conventions (spelling, punctuation, grammar) and creative ideas? Which is easier / harder?

5. Many parents did not know many specific examples of how writing lessons go in class. How do you think parents should find out about writing lessons? (For example, is student homework enough?)

6. How important is it for parents and students to understand how writing is being taught and why the teacher does it that way? (Do they need to understand or is it best left up to the teacher?)

7. Only one student who responded was from the regular program, the rest are in sports alternative programming. Why do you think more sports students responded?

Possible Follow-up Interview Questions (Teachers)

1. The parents, teachers and students who responded to the surveys expressed many of the same definitions of what a good writer can do. Where do you think we get our understanding of what good writing is? (Is it primarily a function of school or is it something intrinsic to "society"?)

2. Many teachers mentioned that they use "6+1 Writing Traits" and Writing Workshop. How would you describe how you approach writing in subject areas other than Language Arts?

3. When asked what they felt needed more emphasis, most parents wanted to see an increase in the work done on teaching conventions (spelling, grammar, punctuation). What is your reaction to this?

4. In general, teachers felt that the most important parts of the school writing program included knowing the writing process and having lots of practice with each step, including real teacher and peer feedback. Is this compatible with parents' call for more work on conventions?

5. Many parents mentioned that they knew very few specifics about how writing is being taught in the classroom. How important is it for parents and students to understand how writing is being taught and the reasons for the methods chosen? How far does teacher responsibility extend in this area?

6. One of the aims of this study was to work on bridging understanding between parents and teachers. Response to this survey format was limited. Are there other ways, within a school context, that we could/should better invite parent involvement in what is happening on an instructional level at school?

7. The vast majority of parents who responded to the survey have children in sports alternative programs. Was there something about this research project, or how it was presented, that made it appeal more to sports alternative parents or do you think it was just the "luck of the draw"?

Appendix E

Participant Codes by Category

Category Codes
Ability
In a reasonable amount of time^[3]
Losing creative ability
Need for scaffolding
Student difficulty with conventions
Take risks
Creative skills^
Deficiency
More formal instruction needed
More consistency in teacher expectations
Not enough emphasis on writing^
After-school program
Written off school-year^
L.A. curriculum ambiguous
My instruction in this area is very weak^
Haven't used literature with 6+1
Need to keep students motivated
Faster turn around
Hope, Trust, and Worry

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[3] ^ indicates *in vivo* code

Whatever they're doing must be working^

Assuming all is well and good^

Worry

Inherent ability to grow^

Hope in natural growth

Interaction

Have had conflict over instruction

Haven't had conflict over instruction

I didn't ask for any information

Never been asked

Through PAC meetings

Parent / Teacher interviews

Information sessions for parents

Info there, parents will get it if they want

Feedback as learning tool

Knowledge of teacher expectations helps parents work with child at home

Parents as challenge

Parent wants not necessarily reasonable

Intimidation of survey

Parent accountability

Impact of socio-economic and demographic

Appearance of collectivity^

E-mail to parents in future

Different levels of involvement

Knowledge through what kids tell parents

Talk to the teacher^

Work Interferes

Too busy

Research impact on teacher participants

Parents' thoughts about others

Do parents read curriculum outline?

Non-sport parent surprise as sport-parent response rate

Students dislike conventions

Parent view of student feelings

Kids don't talk about school^

Teachers don't worry about conventions

Students' thoughts about others

Parents want more than students do

Teachers' thoughts about others

Parents want 'cut and dried'^

Parent emotion per assessment

Parents overemphasizing writing

Parent desire in assessment

Positive stereotype of sports parents

Some parents not interested

Sports kids/parents who don't fit positive stereotype

Student emotion per assessment

Generalizations of student enjoyment

Reluctant to share drafts

Kid's want a mark, too^

Really excited about writing^

Other teachers emphasize conventions

Positive views of teachers' abilities

Teachers' & Parents' thoughts about others

Motivation of sports parents

Sports parents more invested in child's education

Sports parents more interested

Different language, culture than school (challenge)

All participants about others

What parents want

Uncertainty

No opinion^

Don't know why^

Teacher as parent unsure

Parent as teacher unsure

How can our child improve^

Student desire to know why

Not understanding has no impact

Won't do well if you don't understand instruction

Little or no knowledge of 6+1 or Writing Workshop

Some knowledge of 6+1

Limited knowledge of 6+1 traits

Don't know about instructional methods

Blank responses (on less of)

Blank responses (on more of)

Nothing^ (on more/most)

Nothing^ (on less/least)

Assessment

Standardized assessments

Students need to know why

Guesswork of knowing teacher expectations

Simpler to mark conventions

Hard do mark ideas

See the process^

Seeing trouble spots^

What are teachers accountable for

Teacher emotion per assessment

Parents want to understand marking scheme

Writing difficult to assess

Other subjects easier to mark

HLAT's less important

I don't assess everything^

Low emphasis on spelling test marks

Marking easy to build confidence

Marking 'hard'

6+1 Traits as marking guide

Student accountability important

Communication

Transportation assists

Transportation interferes

Just simple explanations enough

Should probably pay more attention^

I think we do pretty well^

Question need to inform about instruction

Should teachers justify methods?

Teachers should inform about instruction

Would information impact what parents do at home?

Teachers should send home notes

Not enough information through work brought home

Preaching to the converted^

Communication an area for growth

Don't communicate about writing

It has to be worth it^

Course description / curriculum outline

Through assignment descriptions

Descriptions in report cards^

Assessment samples to share

Assessment via marks

Assessment via comments

Book report^

Mostly stories^

News articles^

Just know what he brought home^

Don't see many writing assignments
at home

Through government websites

Saw a bulletin board about it^

Information from school displays

Put it on the wall for people to look at^

Notes / Newsletters

Notes in agendas

Expertise

Parents as experts on their child

Teachers as experts at instruction

Areas for emphasis

More planning time

More story writing

More grammar

More conventions (punctuation / spelling)

(more) Purpose to write^

(more) Fun activities^

(more) News articles^

More writing needed

More choice and options

(less) Explaining previous material

(less) Handouts^

Less handwriting

Less reading

Less reviewing punctuation, etc.

Less writing needed

Less work at home

Book reports^ (positive)

Like use of dictionaries

A picture to write about (positive)

Interesting assignments^

Opinion of writer's workshop

Writer's workshop important

Prefer writing workshop

The way they teach writing is okay^

Makes my writing more fluent^

Seems like a good idea (6+1)

Use literature with 6+1

6+1 a little too structured

Lessons clearly laid out^ (6+1)

6+1 easy to use in other subjects

Journaling is not writing^

Home journal as extra work

Doing it at home

Reading helps writing

Reading writing important

Teaching grammar in everyday speech

I know what I'm doing is effective^

Defending the program

Writing by choice^

Student based approach^

General / flexible approach to L. A. curriculum

Spelling units help writing

Other benefits of spelling
Convention skills need to transfer

You don't need perfect conventions^

Need good conventions

Process / conventions not compatible

Process / conventions compatible

Conventions secondary to information

Parts in isolation least important

The happy balance^

Multi-step approach important

Effective writing and review process needed

Modeling writing

Lots of writing appreciated

Practice important

Exposure to all kinds of writing

Structure less important

Disregard for non-author writing

Feedback important

Focused on content^

Notions of quality

Thoughtfully^

Not too much made up^

Introduction, body, conclusion

Problem and solution

A story^

Good presentation

Good punctuation^

Good sentence fluency^

It flows^

Proper grammar^

Proper spelling^

Good vocabulary^

Descriptive words^

Descriptive manner^

Learn good words^

Interesting, creative

It appeals to you^

Keeping purpose in consideration

Easy to read^

Making your point important

Conveys message^

Clear, coherent, understandable

Good organized fashion^

Tone, voice

Hand-in quality^

Craft writing^

Variety of styles well

For various reasons

Opinions on Technology

No more spell check^
Spell check to fix conventions
Computers less important
Text-messaging and poor conventions
Valuations of time
Poor timing of survey
Long procedure to make a good story
(Sports parents) More time available
Conventions and time
Time constraints
More time for writing
Peer work as time-saver
Writing for the future
Writing as needed life skill
Good career may not need good writing
Instructional Methods
Use of picture prompts
Story writing^
Author's chair^
Share writing with others
Individual teacher feedback
Class feedback
Convention work in feedback

Writing integrated with social studies

Reports and essays (social studies)

Information posters (social studies)

Organizing information in other subjects

Writing based science projects

Vocabulary in other subjects

Spelling as vocabulary

Use of other writing programs

Through language arts class

6+1 writing traits are taught^

Use of 6+1 Writing Traits in school

Use of writer's workshop

Different levels of completion (in writing workshop)

Workshop frequency

Workshop and student choice

Workshop and talking

Peer involvement in workshop

Workshop and writing technologies

Sustained writing^

Free-flow writing

Students in topic choice

Parts of writing process

Planning and drafting

- Editing process as convention work
- Convention emphasis in peer-edit
- Revision as stage
- Teaching grammar and sentence form
- Practice writing^
- Written responses^
- Spelling in isolation^
- Punctuation easier than ideas
- Spelling and conventions easier than ideas
- Ideas harder than conventions

Learning good writing

- Learn it at school^
- Research it^
- Learn it at home^
- From reading^
- From reading to own children
- Through printing and handwriting^
- Writing as career
- Job involved writing
- From experience as teacher
- From shared writing
- Being a university student

Experience

School writing as positive experience

Don't remember a lot^

Parents from 'generation of spelling and grammar'^

Remember spelling and spelling tests

Remember studying grammar

Negative memories of spelling

Coping with dyslexia

Handwriting as negative

Handwriting a positive

Good reader / Not good writer

Frustration with creative writing

Fine with informational writing

Negative impact of French immersion on English writing

Remember writing in other subject areas

Remember writing poetry

Remember writing reports and essays

Remember writing stories

Remember parent affirmation

Remember teacher affirmation

Didn't enjoy writing until graduate studies

Teacher experience impact on instructional choices

Have had conflict over instruction

Haven't had conflict over instruction